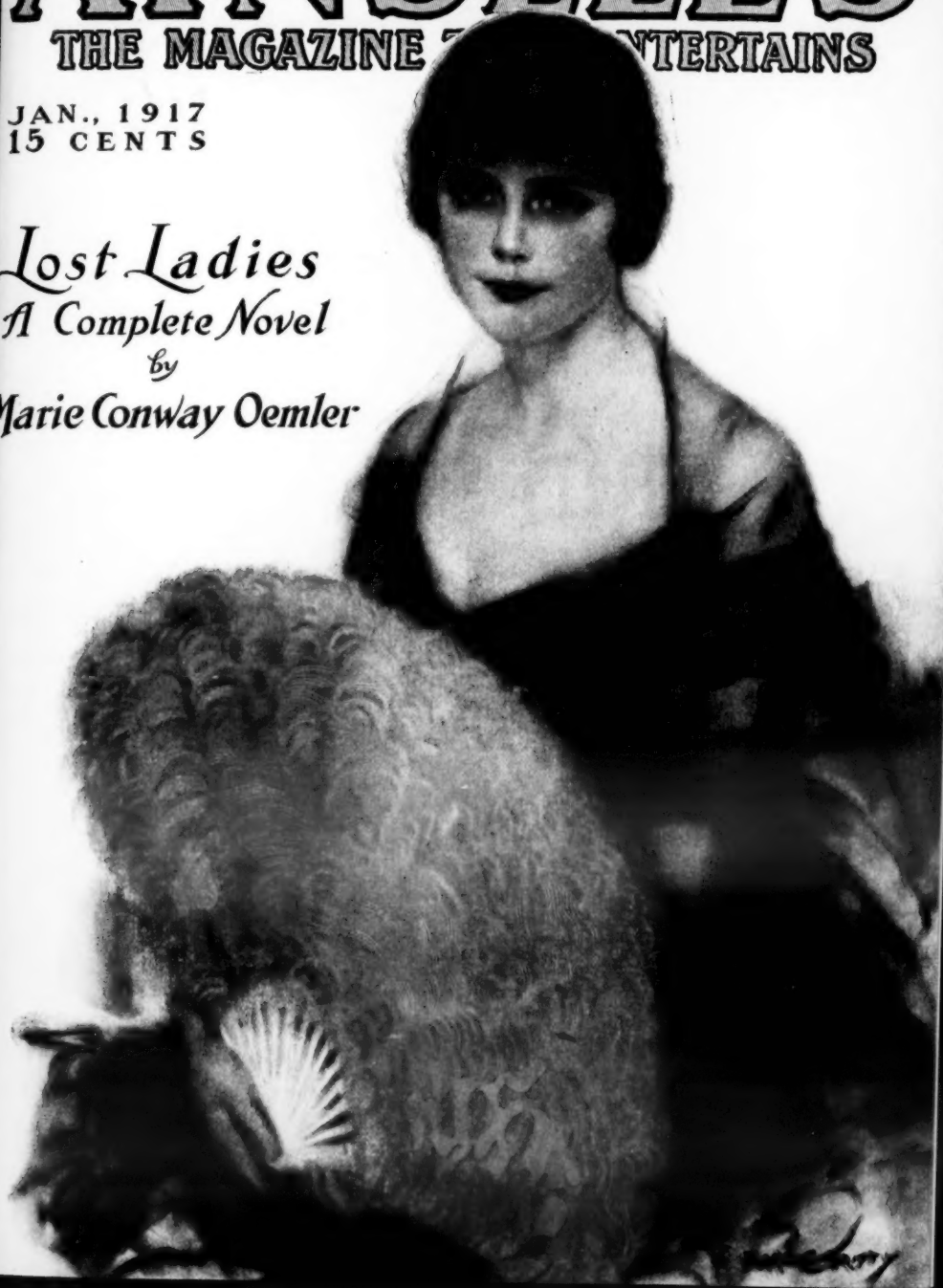


# AINSLIE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

JAN., 1917  
15 CENTS

*Lost Ladies*  
A Complete Novel  
By  
Marie Conway Oemler





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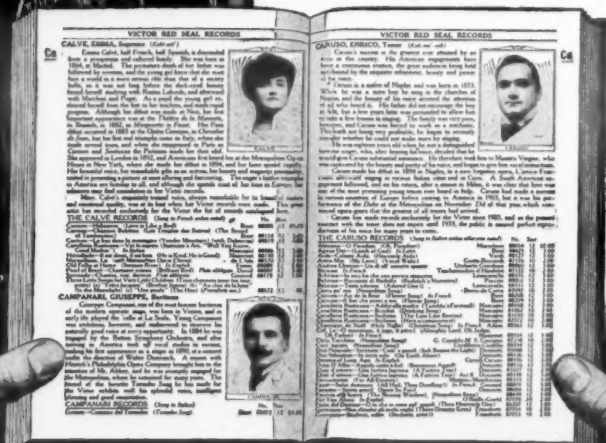
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# AINSLIE'S

*The Magazine That Entertains*

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# AINSLIE'S

VOL. XXXVIII.

JANUARY, 1917.

No. 6.



## Lost Ladies

By Marie Conway Oemler

Author of "The One-Sixteenth,"  
"The Eternal Two," etc.

### CHAPTER I.

AND to my nephew, William Ravenant Ravenant, all that certain tract and parcel of land known as Lost Island; with this condition, however: that he shall neither lease nor sell any part or parcel of the said Lost Island to any person or persons whomsoever; and that he shall, within one month after the reading of this, my last will and testament, proceed to the said Lost Island and there remain and reside for the space of not less than six months.

"But should my said nephew, William Ravenant Ravenant, after due deliberation and consultation with my friend and attorney, John Anthony Roberts, refuse to fulfill these conditions, I then direct that the whole of the said Lost Island shall become, in fee simple, the property of the said John Anthony Roberts; and in lieu thereof the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars in cash shall be paid to my said nephew, William Ravenant Ravenant."

It was a pleasant afternoon in early September, a month after my Uncle William Ravenant's sudden death, and we were gathered in his attorney's offices, listening to the reading of his will. And a strange will it was, for more than one of us. He had been

reputed a millionaire, yet beyond a few legacies to old and faithful servants and the above curious provision for me, the supposed heir, the will showed him to be a man of very moderate means indeed. Of the talked-of millions there was not a trace, although during his lifetime he had had, apparently, unlimited command of money.

We are not a large family, we Ravenants, and of the few relatives present none, save his half sister, Mrs. Trescott, and I, his namesake, had really known or loved him. Even we had never been wholly in his confidence, for he had been an inveterate wanderer, given to sudden disappearances and to long and mysterious journeys, none knew whither.

A man of striking beauty, impressive dignity, a wide culture, of the most simple and exquisite manner, he had been eagerly sought; but he had met all advances with almost visible reluctance, appearing but rarely in society and then under stress. I imagine my Aunt Trescott had supplied the stress; nothing but her complaints had ever driven him into attendance upon any social event.

To me alone, the doubly orphaned son of his youngest brother, he had seemed to unbend. He had tacitly allowed the world to look upon me as

his heir, and I had always been most liberally provided for. I confess I had always stood in some awe of him; his melancholy, his aloofness, his pale, beautiful face with its great dark, somber eyes, had had for me a fascination not unmixed with timidity. I loved my Aunt Trescott, who had done her best to spoil me. But I did not know until long afterward how wistfully my uncle had watched me; I could not guess his sleepless vigilance, his untiring, careful planning in my behalf.

The cablegram announcing his death had caught me in London, whither I had rather aimlessly returned after a year's wandering, following my graduation from Harvard. He had insisted upon that vacation, professing himself more than satisfied with my college record; although, to tell the truth, I hadn't shone greatly in anything but football.

"When you return, we'll have a long talk, you and I," he had said, when he had told me good-by. "I'll give you a year to see the world. Then I have other work for you."

I had come to Savannah to find him in his grave. He had been found lying across his desk, an unfinished letter to me under his hand; a dear, dear letter, full of kindness, of affection, and gently asking me to hurry home to him, that he thought he had need of me.

I remember sitting in a sort of stupefaction, listening to old Roberts' dry voice reading the will; I remember the furtive glances in my direction, the sly smile of my cousin, George Tenney, the direct, shocked gaze of my Aunt Trescott. I saw Thomas Savage lift his long white hand to his pinkish beard, a curious twist to his lip, and I knew he was readjusting his estimate of me, there being somewhat of a difference between the heir of a millionaire uncle and the owner of nothing but a hummock in the Georgia marsh and a pittance of twenty-five thousand dollars.

I managed to conceal the astonish-

ment, the disappointment, natural under the circumstances. My uncle, I reflected, had evidently speculated heavily, lost, risked more, and lost again; perhaps that was why he had thought he might need me. I couldn't otherwise understand the situation. I knew the man to have been delicately honorable, rigidly just; and I knew, too, that I had not merited any diminution of his trust and affection.

"It is perfectly astounding!" gasped my aunt, when Roberts' dry voice had ceased, and each knew exactly what William Ravenant had or hadn't left him. "Even if William had lost everything he possessed—which I don't believe, for he told me himself he had doubled his fortune—he must have been *crazy* to make such a will. And he was not crazy at all—he was frightfully sane," she finished inconsistently.

"Ve-ry singular, indeed!" agreed Thomas Savage, reaching for his hat. "And I must say it was very misleading—not to say worse—of William to allow us all to suppose Will his heir."

He looked at me resentfully, as if he blamed me for all those years of seeming friendship and interest he had been compelled to bestow upon a beggar.

"Harvard—and automobiles—and trips abroad; and Lost Island—and sandpips—and cockspurs!" commented George Tenney. "The later in case Will's mad enough to obey a mad will. If any one asked my advice, I'd say take the twenty-five thou and light out for the Northwest, where he'd have a better show. Brawn's his strong point, and out there he wouldn't miss brains." He turned to me unctuously. "Anyway, let me know what you decide, and I'll be glad to see you off."

"Of course you will," said my aunt tartly. "I remember you in your cradle, George. You were an odious baby! You scratched your sister Mary's face, and you bit old Maum Chloe with your third tooth."

"Anyway, I hope you'll enjoy Lost Island," grinned Tenney, wisely ignoring my aunt's remarks and backing out of the room.

"The Tenneys are petering out, Will," said my aunt, looking after him. "Can you believe it—that fellow's parents were both really decent people?" Her voice expressed wonder.

"Awful little scrub," I agreed.

She drew near and put her arm around my shoulders. Aunt Trescott is one of those dear, warm, fireside women who carry their brains in their hearts, a first-class place for brains to be.

"I know you well enough to be sure you're going to obey that will, wild as it seems," she said, hugging me. "Will, my dear, I can't help thinking there's something behind it, something we can't guess. William wasn't the sort to do things without reason. Cold and distant he may have seemed, but he was at heart just and kind—and loving, too. I think he loved you, Will. My darling boy, I'm sure he loved you."

"I'm going," I said. "Lost Island for mine!"

She kissed me.

"I can't help being glad you didn't grow up with nothing but dreary common sense," she said inconsequently, as she adjusted her little veil over her fluffy white hair and fresh-colored, youthful face. "It's a great consolation to me," she went on, smiling. "Oh; my dear, my dear, believe me, William knew with whom he was dealing—somebody loyal and wisely foolish enough to obey a dead man's wish, even when it looks unreasonable on the surface."

She kissed me again, and left me alone with the lawyer, who, having seen the door close on her silk skirts, beckoned me into his own sacred den.

"You'll go, Billy?" It struck me that his voice was anxious.

"I'm going," I said again.

And I thought he looked relieved and anxious, too. Roberts had the conventional dryness supposed to be an earmark of lawyers, an unusually long head, an unusually sallow face, and a pair of fine brown eyes full of a sly humor.

"My uncle was always kind to me," I said. "He asks me to do this, and I'll obey him: It's no more than he deserves at my hands." I suppose I choked a little there, for I had loved him and his sudden death had been a severe blow to me. "Besides," I hastened to relieve the tension, "six months isn't long in passing, and I suppose I can study something on Lost Island, wherever the bally place is, can't I?"

"I think," said Roberts deliberately, "that you'll learn considerable on Lost Island, Billy." There was that in his voice which made me prick up my ears.

He, in the meantime, unlocked a steel safe in the corner and handed me a letter addressed to me in my uncle's firm writing. It was not without emotion that I read his message:

MY DEAR WILL: Try now to remember me as you knew me, and I think you will admit I have never been unreasonable, unjust, or given to asking favors lightly. But I do ask a favor now. Go, for my sake, to Lost Island. Occupy my old room in the Red House. I give you Lost Island and all it contains, and, under God, I believe you will be equal to the gift. It is because of this implicit faith that I bequeath the place to you, and I shall die happy in the belief that you will do whatever is to be done, loyally and well.

Remember, the place is infinitely dear to me. Will, once I, too, was young; once I, too, dwelt in Arcadia.

I read with astonishment this letter, presenting to me a William Ravenant I had but dimly guessed.

"When we talked it over, I told him you'd go," said the lawyer, who had been watching me intently. Putting his hand on my shoulder, he added: "I knew we could depend upon you. No," he continued, as I looked up inquiringly,



"I can't say more than that Lost Island ought to stay lost for the present, and I hope you'll bear that in mind. Your uncle took every precaution to that effect. It was his life work. I believe—upon my soul, I begin to believe—that he died when he did—and how he did—because of Lost Island."

"Mr. Roberts!"

I was upon my feet in a second, a sickening fear gripping me. I remembered how he had been found, prone across his desk.

"They picked up his trail—at last," said the lawyer, in a fierce whisper. "He told me that much himself, but more than that I don't know. He seemed to have a premonition, for he knew they'd think the road clear if he were out of the way. Hence his plans for you to take his place."

I stared, in dumb amazement.

"Heart failure, those fool doctors said. No reason, either, to think anything else, for there wasn't a mark," said Roberts, still in that fierce whisper. "Billy, I haven't a ghost of a clew or the shadow of a proof, and I'm a fool to babble suspicions in your ears. I'm exceeding my instructions, as it is. But as you're going to Lost Island, you're going with a hint from me to keep your eyes wide open and to see that your gun's always loaded and handy."

"What on earth are you talking about?" I jerked.

But Roberts suddenly closed his mouth like a trap. Not another word could I wring from him. From another drawer in the safe, he handed me a roll of bills, my usual allowance.

"According to instructions," he said shortly. "Now go home, young man, and think this matter over."

I went out into the cool evening air, inclined to think my uncle's death had unhinged Mr. Roberts' reason. I was still puzzling over the affair when, turning a corner, I came face to face with Dan Ross.

We had been college chums; and while I had been abroad, Dan, wishing to become a journalist, had secured a berth on the home paper. It was, indeed, the most grandmotherly of dailies, run by a plethoric trio of fat men whose pride and boast was the eloquent fact that the paper had never been sued, never even been threatened with a suit, in the whole course of its existence! With this mummy of a paper Dan was entombed.

"It thinks itself virtuous when it's only respectable," he had lamented in one of his letters to me. "It hasn't a comic supplement, but it solemnly reports all the local sermons on Monday. Its editorials are written with a knitting needle dipped in catnip tea. The governor insists that I shall settle, and I'm sinking. Behold me grasping a *Blade* whose keenest edge wouldn't cut anything tougher than a prayer meeting."

"I was just in search of you, Billy," said Dan, thrusting a determined arm through mine. "What's this evil rumor of the heir being disinherited? And all the mazuma gone to the bowwows? What's up, old chap? If it's just idle gossip, tell me, and I'll cut it out with my faithful *Blade*. Open up!"

"I'm hungry," I told him. "Let me first get something to eat, and I'll tell you all I don't know."

"Come on with me," said Dan joyfully. "I've a place where a retired pirate cooks spaghetti and broils devil-fish for the elect. He has a lair up two flights of stairs in a back street, and the said hole may or may not be the haunt of gentlemen of the Black Hand, the Mafia, the Camorra, but their appearance warrants the suspicion. The retired pirate is some thousand years old, has all his teeth and nails, and can sing like a Caruso of forty. Sound good to you?"

I said briefly:

"Lead me, my faithful dog."

"By grace I nosed it out, and by grace



I've become even the apple of the pirate's good eye," chortled Dan. "Now I fare on macaroni that is macaroni and not boiled hay, and I drink deep of wine that payeth not toll to custom-houses."

We went down a darkening street, all warehouses and smells—the mingled odors of guano, coffee, hides, fruit, fish, and people. One doesn't soon forget smells like that! Over an Italian grocery, in a corner of a dingy tenement, was the stronghold of Dan's pirate.

Up a flight of stairs like a ship's ladder, through a dark hall full of more smells, then up another stairway, and finally crossing a narrow landing, we entered a large room opening into another larger room and a smaller side one. The place overflowed with barrels and boxes, cans and bottles. Many of the barrels served as tables.

A very old man, with a gallant red sash twisted around his waist and a pair of huge gold earrings swinging from his enormous ears, lifted his head from a steaming pot and greeted Dan in rapid-fire Italian, talking not only with his mouth, but with his ears, his nose, his hands and feet, his whole body. Two jetty eyes, which had once been magnificent, gleamed with shrewd humor and intelligence from under a graying thicket of eyebrows.

We seated ourselves at an oilcloth-covered table in the smaller room, and the old Italian served us. Leaning on the back of Dan's chair, he talked familiarly, with a shrewdness, a witty freedom, that was delightful; but one saw that he struggled with but ill success to conceal some painful inward agitation.

"What's the matter, captain?" asked Dan kindly, noting his manner. "Anything I can do for you?"

The old man glanced cautiously into the outside room, which at that moment was quite empty. Then he hurriedly snatched from his sash a piece of crum-

pled and dirty paper, thrusting it into Dan's hand.

"Not here! Madonna! Not here!" he said vehemently, as Dan started to unfold it. "Into the pocket with it, and of a quickness! Signor, know that it concerns my granddaughter, Angela."

"Why, I didn't know you had a granddaughter," said Dan surprisedly.

Glancing scornfully around the dingy rooms, the old man shrugged his shoulders.

"She is not one to name aloud here," he said proudly. "Why is it that I, Pecici, once the sea captain, who should be carrying these old bones home for burial in my own country, should be staying in this devil of a hole, hah? It is for her, the beloved, the child of the child of my old age. Signors, she is what you will call the lady. She for years has been in the convent with the ladies the Sisters, and now she will teach the little kids the French and the Italian. But of her great affection she will come here to see me—she will insist that she must talk in our own tongue with the old grandfather. They learned of her, those accursed ones, and they threatened. If it were not for a great fear for her, I would laugh. But I will see them all dead and damned before they touch a penny of the money I have sweated out of my old bones to make her future easy!"

He ceased abruptly, going forward to take the orders of two or three men who had entered.

"When you finish gourmandizing, Billy, we'll toddle along to my rooms, and you can unbosom yourself to my faithful ears," said Dan. "You *can't* be in very great trouble and stuff spaghetti like that!" he commented frankly.

The September dusk had fallen when we left Pecici's, both vehemently praising the pleased old seaman for his delectable spaghetti. We had walked some distance when, across the street, we noticed a young woman walking

hurriedly, but with so swift a grace that we turned our heads to follow her movements. We did not pay quite so much attention to the two rather roughly dressed fellows who were walking quite as rapidly a little distance in her rear. She had passed the cobbled crossing when a third man darted from a little black-alleyway between two ugly houses, and in another moment the three men were upon her.

It was so sudden, so unexpected, there in the empty street whose dusk the arc light only partly dispelled, that for the moment we two, across the street and standing in the black shadow of the huge warehouse we had been passing, stood stock-still with amazement. But as one ruffian's hand closed over the girl's mouth to prevent an outcry, Dan shouted and the two of us ran forward.

At the call, and the sound of our running feet, the three scoundrels instantly fled down a side street, losing themselves in the black mazes of the neighborhood.

The voice that thanked us was exquisite, with just a hint, a bare suspicion, of a foreign flavor to lend it tang and piquancy.

"I was on my way to visit my grandfather," she explained hurriedly. "I had a very busy day, and although it was a bit late to start out alone, still, in America——"

"Those fellows weren't Americans," said Dan quickly.

"They are Italians, as I am myself. My name is Angela Pecici," she told us.

And under the arc light she lifted a young and most lovely face, framed in a profusion of intensely black hair. Her eyes were wonderful—a deep blue under straight black brows, and she had that clear and dark and yet rosy skin, that round chin, and that straight nose, which Rome and Greece adored. She was very simply, but daintily, dressed, and her strong and beautiful

body was the perfection of grace and symmetry.

And so this was Pecici's Angela, the "lady" for whom the good old sailor toiled morning and night, at a calling that, to say the least, must have been very distasteful to him. No wonder the old fellow was so willing to sacrifice himself for such a girl as this! No wonder he was terrified and enraged at the bare hint of danger threatening her! Dan and I looked at each other, remembering with a sense of uneasiness the dirty letter even now in Dan's possession, the letter that Pecici had given us to understand threatened her. Dan, after he had told her who we were, added hesitatingly:

"You see, we know your grandfather, Miss Pecici. Mr. Ravenant and I have just come from there. So we're going to advise you not to try to see him tonight. It would just terrify him. Believe us, we have good reason for giving you this counsel. If you will allow me, I will walk back to the convent with you—you stay with the Sisters, don't you?—and Mr. Ravenant will see that your grandfather receives any message you may care to send him."

"I suppose you are right," she agreed composedly. What we liked about her at once was that she seemed to understand without questioning; that she made no useless fuss, but seemed to grasp the situation and rise to it.

"Tell him you want a bottle of anisette, Billy. Then manage to whisper that we've met Miss Angela and that I've taken her back to the convent," said Dan.

So I turned back obediently, while Dan, offering the young girl his arm, walked off with her down the cobbled street, his tall figure looming a head above her.

I managed to whisper in Pecici's huge ear the message I wished to give him, and he handed me the anisette a

few minutes later, with a trembling old hand.

"The Mother of God bless you both!" he breathed. "Some day may she make you rejoice that you saved my Angela!"

During our brief absence, the rooms had filled with laughing, gesticulating Italians, whose gay, good-humored badinage flew like thistledown from table to table.

Two men sat at a table near the door. They were evidently foreigners, but not the quick, vivid Italians, for they spoke slowly, without gestures, and they took no part in the general conversation humming back and forth. As I passed them, I caught a fragment of their conversation, in fairly good French.

In the one glance I was able to cast upon them, their faces were indelibly impressed upon my memory. One was a man somewhat past middle age, stoop-shouldered, with arms unusually long, suggestive of an ape's, a dead-white face, and eyes utterly void of expression; they stared before him with the horrible fixity of a dead man's. The whole aspect of the man was cold, sinister, menacing. His companion was younger and more powerfully built. Of a fair and ruddy hue, he was tall and broad, and his gray eye was quick and alert, although cold. A nasty scar ran from brow to chin, losing itself in his red beard, which was slightly grayed.

Neither of them lifted his eyes to me as I passed them on my way out; their conversation, however, was broken off abruptly, to be resumed when I should be out of earshot. As for me, I went soberly enough down the breakneck stairs, and I admit that I was startled. For what he of the scarred face had said to his dead-alive companion was this:

"If Ravenant had not the chance to warn that damned Smelkoff——"

I had heard no more. What Rave-

nant—my uncle or I? And who and what and where was that damned Smelkoff? And what was he to be warned about? I hadn't the ghost of an idea!

## CHAPTER II.

"No, suh, he ain't in yit," said January, Dan's old servant, who answered my ring. "More'n dat, I ain't know, 'en yo' ain't know, 'en 'tain't nobuddy but Gawd does know, w'en he is gwine ter be in. Dat boy hop 'long like er cock robin, 'en Gawd knows whah he gwine ter light. I'se gittin' so's I can't see straight no mo', sence he come back from cawledge. I looks fo' him hyuh, 'en he's yander; 'en I looks yander, 'en he's hyuh. What kind er way's dat fo' de boy ter ack?" he complained bitterly.

"Business, January, business," I consoled, as he took my hat.

"Business!" snorted January, shuffling down the hall. "Flyin' roun' like one er dem Gawd-fersaken Juny bugs, runnin' attah de fiah bell 'en de hurry-up wagon 'en de 'fish p'leeceman, 'en callin' 'em 'business!' He pa ain't useter call dem kind er gyrashuns business, Mas' Billy."

"Times are changed, January. And people must change with them," I brooded.

"Dey is. Dey suttinly is," agreed January solemnly, wagging his bald head, upon which a few tufts of snowy wool stuck straight up. "I 'spec' it's mos' time fo' de worl' ter end. 'En ef it ain't, it oughter be."

Turning on the electric in Dan's sitting room, he dragged forward a morris chair piled with cushions.

"Does yo' want somepin ter eat, Mas' Billy?" he asked hospitably. "I kin cook yo' a aig, 'en we-all got some col' chicken 'en some er Miss Harriet's port wine lef'."

"No, thank you, January. Mr. Dan and I have just had dinner."

January whirled around on his splay feet and crooked a long black forefinger.

"Don' yo' tell me dat boy's been stuffin' hisse'f wid dem owdashus debbilfishes en t'ing ag'in!" he implored. "My Gawd, what I gwine do wid him? He done be too big now ter lambast!"

Without another word, but sighing like a furnace, he went out and shut the door softly behind him.

Left alone, I fell into a brown study, turning over in my mind the untoward happenings of the day. A vague uneasiness oppressed me. I had begun to agree with my aunt that something was behind that strange bequest; that something, I knew not what, awaited me at Lost Island.

I was still sunk in reverie when Dan returned, bringing with him something of freshness, of buoyant youthfulness, into the quiet room. January followed, fluttering around him like a scolding jackdaw.

"Yo' been wid dem furriners ag'in?" he demanded. "Ain't white folks' vittles good 'nuff fer yo' no mo'?"

"Now, you look here, January——"

"Is yo' ain't, or ain't yo' is?"

"Excuse this little domestic fracas, Billy," said Dan, taking his old servant under the arms and hoisting him bodily out of the room. Locking the door, he sat down opposite me, laughing.

"January grew up with Methuselah, and he's forgotten how to die," he said merrily. "He was weaned on pickled peppers and he can't get over it. But when it comes tight down to faithfulness and true affection, Damon and Pythias are old shirts next to my old January, Heaven bless him!"

I nodded understandingly. I had one of my own.

"And now to buckle down to business," said Dan briskly. "Let's read Pecici's very dirty love letter and see what the pother's about, and then to your affairs."

Pecici's love letter proved to be a crumpled piece of coarse paper, some six inches long, couched in execrable Italian. Translated, it read:

Give us five thousand dollars or we will take the girl. If you make us do this, you will not be glad to have her back again. She will not be so pretty without ears.

Directions were given where to place the money, followed by a fierce threat, should the old man fail to send it or should he dare to notify the police. The paper bore a date, and "second notice;" and the signature was the usual villainously drawn hand holding a dagger, roughly outlined in black ink.

Dan whistled. A frown wrinkled his forehead.

"She's a beautiful girl, Billy. And she's as sweet and true a lady as I ever knew—as nice as your sister or mine might be, if we were fortunate enough to have sisters. And she's immensely clever and altogether charming."

I said I thought it highly probable she was all he said. But I didn't believe those scoundrels would dare to carry out the threats they made; they were only trying to bluff the old man into paying them a good sum of money.

"I'd show the letter to the chief, anyhow," I counseled. "Tell him to keep quiet until something really happens, but put him wise to the fact that somebody needs watching."

"I'll see him in the morning," agreed Dan. "I'll see Pecici in the morning, too. I've warned his granddaughter that she'd better stay quiet in the convent for a while and never go out unattended. I think I'll go tell her so again," he added naively. "She's a beautiful girl."

Neither of us dreamed that we were to see Angela when we least expected it, nor did we suspect the part she was to play in our affairs.

"Now for your own business, Billy," said Dan. "Is it true there's no for-

tune? Is it true you've been 'shook,' and why? Have you robbed the poor box, or eloped with a chorus lady, or what under the sun *did* you do to be left out, if you *are* left out?"

Beginning with the will and ending with the fragment of sentence overheard at Pecici's, I told him all I knew. When I had finished, he sat for a space with his head leaning on his hand.

"Might I see your uncle's letter, if you have it?" he asked.

When he had read and studied it, he shook his head.

"He hadn't changed toward you," he said thoughtfully. "He hasn't said beans about any loss of fortune, either. I rather agree with Mrs. Trescott, Billy. There's something behind all this."

"And—Mr. Roberts' suspicion?"

"I don't think anything of it," said Dan frankly. "They are all suspicious, those lawyers. It's their business, and after a while it becomes their morals. But I've a hunch there'll be something doing on Lost Island. Nice piracy name, that! Have you decided when you're going?"

"Just as soon as I can get ready, which will be in about a week. I've got to get my kit and a launch, and then I'm off."

"Where is this interesting hole?" he asked curiously.

"Frankly, I haven't the ghost of an idea just *where* it is. I believe it's a day-and-night journey in a good naphtha—the last island off the coast and a good bit out seaward. I'd forgotten the place existed—I fancy most people have—until the will. I know it's been in the family since before the Revolution—king's charter and all that. Nobody else wanted it, so we Ravensants kept it. My great-grandfather took a notion to build a house there, to retire to when the humor seized him to seek solitude. But it's so far away and uninteresting and inaccessible that no one

ever goes there, and save for the few negroes on the place, it's quite deserted."

Dan's eyes sparkled as he leaned forward and placed his hand on my knee.

"It sounds unusual," he said. "I don't believe William Ravenant was crazy when he made that will, and I believe this thing is going to turn out strangely. Billy, I'm going to ask you to take me with you, for the first month or so at least. I can easily arrange with the *Blade* to get off. To tell you the truth, they aren't so plumb crazy over my interesting services. They look upon me as young and hopeful and trivial. And I want to go with you, and maybe in that solitude I can begin the book I'm aching to start. I'll take my notes along."

"You mean it?" I doubted. "Right hand on your heart?"

"Hope I may die 'f I don't," said Dan. "It's settled. I invite myself to go."

For a long time we talked over my affairs, which to our young and optimistic eyes began to assume brighter prospects. Counting up my assets, they at least balanced my liabilities. I was four-and-twenty, with a sound mind in a sound body; I had received an excellent education—I was even somewhat of a linguist, which is a Ravenant trait; years of hard athletics had given me the lean and stringy strength of the race horse, leaving but little superfluous meat on my big bones, but building considerable muscle.

Dan said that I was fairly prepossessing—that some people whose taste might be considered not so bad had thought me tolerably handsome, for I had inherited the dark, clear Ravenant face. He added that I was "friendly as a pup that had never been bootied."

I was, indeed, optimistic. For the Hills o' Hope were still before me, their fairy uplands gleaming in the sun-



light of youth. Thanks to certain definite ideals that had steered me clear of the primrose path, I found myself facing life clear-eyed, vigorous, clean-skinned, with healthy blood dancing in my young body and healthy hopes dancing in my young head.

"Heigho for Lost Island!" I said, as Dan and I shook hands for the night.

"January begins to pack to-morrow morning!" he assured me.

Every minute of the week that followed was crowded with the innumerable things I had to attend to. Dan had readily procured his leave of absence, so I was sure of his company; my exile took on a brighter aspect.

Together we decided upon the motor boat, a stanch, fairly large craft, with room aft for a cubby-hole of a cabin. She was capable of standing considerable weather, and her engine was above reproach. Mindful of Mr. Roberts' hints, the lockers were loaded with a goodly supply of guns and ammunition. The lawyer himself attended to the food supply, adding many delicacies, which surprised me, for he was a most abstemious man.

"Your uncle always took them with him," he said shortly.

Later, he brought aboard the Persian cat that had been my uncle's one pet.

"I present her to—Lost Island," he said dryly.

Dan brought with his luggage a wicker basket carefully covered.

"My pigeons," he explained cheerfully. "Thought I'd like to have 'em along."

"Pigeons?"

"Prize carriers," said Dan proudly. "Man, if I turned one of these fellows loose from Lost Island, January'd have a message from me in an hour or so. I fancied I'd like to have them with me."

When Roberts had learned that Dan

was to accompany me, he had thrust out his under lip thoughtfully, rubbing his lank jaws with his bony hand.

"It may be for the best," he had agreed, after a long pause. "Yes, I dare say it's for the best. Under that rattlebrain exterior of his, Dan Ross has enough sense to make men like me respect him. He's honest and truthful, or he wouldn't be your best friend. But are you sure he's discreet?"

"He can be when he's so minded," I had said. "If there were any danger that he mightn't be, one would only have to hint to him to be silent, and wild horses couldn't drag a word out of Dan."

Roberts had nodded.

"I'm glad he's going," he had said. "It went against my grain to let you go alone."

"I'm taking old Sam along, too, you know," I had reminded him. "He refused to stay behind—began to blubber. I'm used to him, and my uncle was always fond of him—so I said he could come. I *might* need him."

Mr. Roberts had smiled at the thought of the old negro.

"You can trust Sam," he had said appreciatively.

"Oh, to the death," I had returned, carelessly enough.

My Aunt Trescott and the lawyer came to see us off, the poor woman crying behind her veil.

"I wanted to go with you, Will," she sobbed. "But he"—she looked at Mr. Roberts resentfully—"point-blank forbade it. He said I'd be in the way, and you'd be easier in your mind to have me here in the city. Oh, Will, dear, dear Will, for Heaven's sake take care of yourself! I packed your clothes myself, and I've given Sam *strict* instructions, so I'm satisfied you'll be well looked after."

She gave me minute instructions as to what I was and wasn't to wear and what I wasn't to change. Then she



cried, and kissed me tenderly, dear soul! A big lump came into my throat as the motor shot out into the river, turned her nose downstream, and left my aunt standing forlornly on the extreme edge of the wharf. So long as she could see us, she waved her handkerchief. Then a bend of the river hid her from our view, and we were fairly off for Lost Island, Dan at the engine, Sam squatting beside him.

It was a bright, fresh morning. I remember how the sunlight played upon the rippling, dancing water; how the high marsh grasses bent to the frolicking wind; how sweet and salt and soft the air that blew in from the sea.

We passed mile after mile of the spear-bladed marshes; lonesome hummocks embowered in sea myrtles; flat banks where sandpips scurried after crawling fiddlers; little beautiful islands, between whose moss-hung trees appeared occasionally fishermen's huts with torn nets drying in the sun and black, half-naked pickaninnies running down to the water's edge to shout at us chugging by; more and more miles of marsh, where white cranes rose in short flights and blue herons sailed by on slow, wide wings and sea gulls skimmed over the blue waters. For this is a land half sea, a sea closely cradled in the green arms of the marsh; a lonesome, lonesome land, whose quiet rivers wind tortuously through the eternal marshes, and where, since creation, it would seem that no man has been.

Toward evening, we stuck immovably upon a sand bar off a crooked elbow of a hummock. The tide rose at midnight and floated us off; but we lay near by, anchored, in drowsy content, and watched the moon rise over the flat green plain, lending it a lost and lonesome beauty, sad and strange and haunting as half-remembered music.

We sat in silence the next morning while the dawn crept over the world, and the morning star hung low and

lustrous, and presently the larger light grew and grew, until, over the out-rolled sea prairies, the sun rose majestically.

"Don't you remember something about the heavens declaring the glory of God and the firmament showing His handiwork?" asked Dan, rather timidly, askamed, after the manner of men, to show his emotion. "Somewhere in the Bible. Astonishing book, that! Some day I'm going to read it clean through and have done with it."

From black Sam at our elbow came a low chuckle. "Ef you starts in ter read dat book, Marse Dan," he said, smiling broadly, "you gwine find out it ain't so easy ter be thoo wid it. For why? 'Ca'se when you gits at de end of de Bible, you's spang in de middle er de beginnin'. You heah me?"

"I do. And you sound inspired," said Dan admiringly.

It was almost noon when we found ourselves skirting the heavily wooded shores of Lost Island; and it took us another hour to thread the tortuous little river and reach the palmetto-log wharf on the eastern shore. Glad enough we were to scramble out of the boat and stretch our cramped legs on firm earth.

One does not see the Red House from the river, for a thick grove of magnificent live oaks and magnolias screens it; and as if to render it yet more hidden, it lies behind a garden, surrounded by a thick hedge, high and evenly clipped. One enters this garden through a fine wrought-iron gate set between two massive brick pillars. A long avenue of palmettos, which reach here a stately height, leads to the house.

On that morning the place was a riot of late roses, of sweet-smelling red oleanders, of asters and goldenrod just ripening, and of festoons of vines, the morning-glory still flowering splendidly. The bricked walks were gay

with an infinite variety of smaller blossoms.

The wide two-storied house itself, gambrel-roofed, its spacious verandas vine-hung and inviting, had an air of comfort and repose, of being inhabited and cared for, which was as agreeable as surprising. I think we had both harbored the vision of an old house possibly decayed, mysterious, haunted, and certainly neglected and desolate.

An old negro, evidently one of the caretakers, met us near the entrance gate, and with many grins of a toothless mouth, many bows of a woolly, snowy head, led us to the house, ushering us into a long, wide, polished hall, lined with old-fashioned mahogany chairs, tables, and settles, and hung with several paintings of—I afterward learned—pre-Revolutionary Ravensants, one or two of them very finely done.

Over the doors were stag heads, beautifully mounted, and an ancient Venetian lantern of a quaint and wonderful pattern hung from the ceiling. The whole atmosphere breathed of the vases of fresh flowers upon the polished tables, and potted plants were everywhere.

"Dey sent me ter meet you-all, suhs. I'll call de people. Yas'r, I'll call de people," said the old negro, hurrying off, while we sat in the wide hall of my new domain and looked about us wonderingly.

"Messieurs," said a quiet voice, following the opening of a door disclosing a dining room, "messieurs, I have to make apologies that I was not on hand to meet you at the landing. I saw you but in time to prepare breakfast for you."

Holding open the door, he bowed us into the room.

Clean-shaven, browned to a mahogany tint from sun and wind, he was of medium height, but of great strength and symmetry. His hair, thickly sprinkled with gray, was cut perfectly

square in front and was rather long; this, with the loose gingham shirt belted at the waist, gave him a strangely foreign appearance. His high forehead flattened into hollows at the temples, and his eyes, of a clear and wistful hazel, had a certain look of what I shall call "inevitableness," for want of a better word. And in spite of his mild eyes, his clear, pale face, his really beautiful mouth, he had an air of being a man of his hands, a man of daring and power and resource.

He looked from Dan to me, upon whom his eyes stayed. I have never met a more intense look; it was as if he were boring into the depths of my mind and heart.

"Monsieur is a true Ravenant," he said, almost with reverence, certainly with relief.

"And may I ask who or what you are yourself, my friend?" I was impatient, weary of wandering in the dark in my own affairs.

He looked at me with a smile.

"I had forgotten that monsieur knew not of me—of us," he corrected hastily, his hand on the doorknob. "I will be Smelkoff."

### CHAPTER III.

The dining room in which we found ourselves was furnished with the same stately simplicity that characterized the hall—that, indeed, was the keynote of the whole house. The bare floor was polished; the walls, of small and evenly matched cedar wood, showed the natural red grain. A round mahogany table bore a substantial and inviting breakfast; above a Sheraton sideboard between two windows hung a fairly good portrait in oils of my uncle, and under this a large cluster of fresh roses had been placed. Two crossed swords in silver scabbards hung over the mantel, and on the big brass dogs in the open fireplace cedar logs were piled,

ready for instant lighting. The room, flooded with sunlight, was exquisitely fresh and clean. Through the open windows one caught the waving palmettos, the yellow sea dunes, the long green reaches of primeval forest; but—giving one a strange sensation—every one of those four open windows was heavily barred with iron rods, lending that far island peacefulness something of the aspect of a jail.

One heard here a perpetual, insistent sound—the long, rolling roar of billows rushing shoreward; for the whole island sings like a shell to the sound of the sea. Never for a moment, day or night, is there a cessation of that eternal music. Sometimes soft and faint and crooning, when the wind is from the west and the moon hangs low; sometimes wild and free and gay, when the south wind swells the chorus; sometimes awful, like the rough chantey of wild mariners from the north; but always and forever the voice of the sea.

"Your belongings, monsieur, have been carried to your room," Smelkoff volunteered, while waiting on us. "We have been expecting you since Monsieur Roberts came to inform us of your uncle's death. When you have breakfasted, we will go upstairs. The chamber prepared is that once occupied by your uncle."

His English was slow, carefully enunciated, and of a labored effort, as if learned after long and careful study. Usually he confined himself to French, which he spoke with great ease and fluency.

We followed him upstairs presently, into a repetition of the downstairs order and cleanliness and perfect taste. The room assigned me was long and wide and low, with windows opening upon the sloping roofs of the piazzas. The walls were hung with "posy" paper; the great old four-poster had a blue-and-white quilt and a big square bolster. A desk of block mahogany,

full of innumerable small drawers and pigeonholes, a colonial highboy, and a shaving stand were ranged primly against one wall. The small, dim glass of the old bureau showed back a ghostly face to one. Bookcases, round tables, and several chairs and rockers completed the furnishings, and the whole effect was quaint and pleasing, from the dark floors to the old prints on the walls.

My suit cases and boxes had been unpacked, my toilet articles spread in orderly rows on the dressing table. Even the framed photograph of my aunt and the kodaks of the college fellows had been hung. My fishing rods were in plain sight, and a Winchester lay within hand's reach of the bed head. I might have lived in the place for years, so completely homelike it appeared and felt. But one thing jarred—the windows were all barred, and the door had a stout oak bar inside.

Dan's room opened off mine, of which it was almost a duplicate. These two rooms, with a bath off Dan's, formed half of the upstairs on one side of a wide central hall. Directly opposite were three closed doors, and as we came out into the hall after inspecting and praising our quarters, Smelkoff knocked lightly upon the first.

"You may enter, Stefan," a voice inside informed him.

He beckoned us to follow; and a second later we were staring into a dazzling room that spoke of France. It was a wonderful room, all the more so because found so unexpectedly in that solitude. There was nothing in it that was not exquisite. It was blue, it was pink, it was gold, it was bronze—all blending into one harmonious whole. It was full of carved chairs, of inlaid tables, of rare cabinets; there were pieces of Sèvres, of copper, of bronze. Tall crystal vases full of roses stood upon a piano piled with music; the

squat bookcase was a blend of exotic books and bindings; the few fine pictures on the wall were signed—a Corot, a Claude Monet, even a Whistler sketch, odd and characteristic. On the mantel, next to a Tanagra figurine, was a clever pen-and-ink sketch of a lean and sardonic face—the dry brown face of Roberts. Above, the dark and melancholy face of William Ravenant stared down at me from a gold frame.

A woman had risen at our entrance and stood facing us, her eyes sweeping past Dan's young comeliness, as Smelkoff's had done, to dwell piercingly upon me, a Ravenant. So, for a space, we stood regarding each other, she full of eagerness, of almost fierce intensity, I with wonder and astonishment.

I think that in her youth she must have been the most beautiful woman in the world. There was still clinging to her a fadeless charm, a something of the ageless spirit that defies decay, although her slight body bore traces of pain, of sorrow, of tragedy. Her hair, heavy and curling, was of a wonderful, glittering whiteness, and her face, like a spirit's, seemed lighted as by a radiance within. It was as if the soul of her shone through that thin, frail body as flame through an alabaster lamp. Her eyes were holy. I do not know to this day what their real color was—whether blue as the sea or brown as autumn leaves—but they held a light that made one reverent. Simply, plainly dressed in a dark gown, one felt that this woman needed no ornament, no finery, save her own graciousness; she was stamped noble, and about her was that intangible and indefinable something, the hall mark, as it were, of the great lady. And as I looked at her, I surmised even then why William Ravenant had died a lonely man and before his time.

She nodded her head to Smelkoff.

"His uncle's nephew, Stefan! Ah,

God is good to us! This is a true Ravenant!"

Under her open approval, I found myself flushing with an intense and almost childish pleasure.

"One may say no more than that for any man, madame," replied Smelkoff, in a low voice.

"And you are wondering who I am—I who so coolly claim you," she said, taking my hand in both hers. "I am Elizabeth Velmaroff."

It seemed to me that I had known Elizabeth Velmaroff since my childhood; I felt no surprise, no sense of wonder, when I looked into her eyes so full of sweetness, of purity, and of trust. I did not even wonder that I had never heard her name until she told it me.

"The name of Ravenant is a passport to the heart of me and mine," she explained to Dan, smiling. "To the uncle of this young man I owe all that one human being can owe to another. All I have, all I can hope for, I owe to him, that good and noble soul gone before me to his reward. I——"

Her hand went to her heart, she grew even paler, and her lips quivered as with intolerable pain.

Smelkoff, with a lightning quickness, placed a chair for her, into which she seemed to collapse. As if knowing just what to do, he went to one of the cabinets, poured some medicine into a small glass, and held it to her lips, supporting her head with one hand while he forced her to drink.

"Messieurs will accept the excuses of us, madame, and see you again when you are better able to converse," he said.

She murmured, "To-morrow," and looked after us wistfully as we went out, closing the door of that mysterious room behind us.

"Let's loaf about a bit," suggested Dan, as we descended the stairs. "Honest Injun, I've had so many bumps

against the unexpected that I'm fazed. I need a pipe and a book. There's a library somewhere, I surmise."

Joe, the old negro who had met us in the morning, opened the library for us—a beautiful long room across the hall, lined from floor to ceiling with such books as a thoughtful and studious man gathers about him. Many of them were foreign classics. Indeed, all the great minds of the earth for-gathered there side by side in silent and reposeful company.

The room spoke of William Ravenant. I saw at a glance that he had used it, even before I opened books bearing his name. This, then, I thought—this house which had been very dear to him—had been the bourne of those mysterious journeyings, and here he had hidden himself from the world. Who was she who had shared his solitude, this strange woman whose illusive, haunting personality fell upon one like a spell? What had she been to that strong man, who had tamed his fiery nature into a mask for her sake? Who and what was Smelkoff, playing a servant's part with a friend's manner and air? And what was I to do, what part was I to play, in this strange household?

One thing was sure, however—if that frail and spiritlike woman needed any help of mine, she should have it at any cost to myself; not for William Ravenant's sake, not because I began to know that he had loved her as few men love women, but for her own sake.

Dan, fidgeting over a book, looked up to ask, in a low voice:

"Like a spirit, isn't she? Lord, what she must have been, once! A woman like that could make men do anything."

Smelkoff sought us out presently, and the cat I had brought, lying lazily on the hearthrug, rose, stretched, and leaped lightly upon his shoulder, purring and even playfully biting his ear.

"Ha, Doushka! An old trick of

thine, that!" he said, stroking her. "And for a female thing, thou wilt have a good memory for old friends. She ~~was~~ born here, you will know," he said to me. "Madame presented her, a kitten, to monsieur your uncle."

I remembered the affection lavished on the beast, and was silent.

The man fell into a reverie, his face weary, full of apprehension, the hollows of the temples seeming more pronounced.

"We have suffered a heavy calamity," he said, more to himself than me, "and I fear I see another approach. Another shock, and she will be gone."

"You mean——" I hesitated.

"She begins to have visions," he said soberly. "She says she feels the net draw near. And the hand that could avert it, that put it aside, has been taken. She grows more feeble. Each day I fear the night, each night I tremble for the morrow. But she will not admit it, she will refuse to see that door which is opening for her, whom God has sorely tried. Still she insists she is strong—and yet—you saw her to-day——" And looking at us with a sad smile, he added: "She asks that you and Monsieur Ross will dine with her to-night."

"We will be delighted," I said, accepting an invitation to dine in my own house, from a strange lady I had met just that morning!

"She would have me say," continued Smelkoff, "that she is sure you are good and brave, but that the quiet which seems to surround us here may at any moment be shattered—that danger lurks wherever we weary ones be. And, messieurs, we beg of you that when you leave this island, you will mention to no human being that you met here, hidden in this Red House, a lady called Madame Velmaroff, Olga, her daughter, and me, Smelkoff, their servant. Madame sends you also this letter, left



in her charge to be given you when you came."

I knew before he handed it to me that it was another message from William Ravenant:

When Elizabeth Velmaroff needs aid, give it, even at the price of your life, if that be necessary, as I would have given mine a score of times. For she and Olga are worth all that a man has of truth, of faith, and of honor. Think of the trust I have for you, when I place in your hands all I held most dear and sacred. Elizabeth herself will tell you, in due time, all that is to be told.

I read in silence this letter, which asked so much and explained so little. I confess that the repeated hints began to annoy me, that this house of barred windows oppressed me. I wished to escape from it for a while—to be outside in the open, under the sky.

"I will have the horses saddled, if it is that you would like to ride across the island," said Smelkoff, seemingly able to read my thoughts.

"Do, Bill. Let's get in the open where we can breathe," implored Dan, whom book and pipe had failed to solace.

A little later, mounted on two good horses, we were riding down the palmetto avenue and out toward the golden dunes.

Lost Island is some seven miles at the widest, some four at the narrowest, and is really two islands divided by a deep salt-water creek running straight across it from the river to the outlying marsh, that everlasting plain, flat, green, glistening, the paradise of water birds. Far, far to the south, the single bright eye of the lighthouse winks at night, and two sides of the island face the undulating world of waters.

Here the sands are golden, the sky cobalt, the sea many colored—jade green, blue, purple. Nowhere else grow such huge pines, such moss-hung live oaks, such magnolias, filling the air with their languorous perfume. There are impenetrable thickets, dense

shades roped with vines. In the center of the island, we found several large fields, well worked, covered with sugar cane, potatoes, and vegetables; behind them a pear orchard, loaded with fruit.

We found no regular roads, only small paths, and these not free of grass and creepers. The Red House was invisible from any point by river, sea, or from the island itself, so completely was it hidden in that secret cove behind its immemorial trees.

Dan and I rode in silence.

"It begins to look like copy," he said aloud, after a long pause. "Those hints—and the barred windows—and—Billy, is that beautiful woman *mad*? The thought seems like profanation, after one has seen her eyes, but I can't help it. And who and where is Olga? Is she your uncle's daughter, do you think? And was that lady upstairs his—wife?"

"If she were crazy, and he'd hidden her here from all save himself and Smelkoff, he wouldn't have hidden his daughter, if he'd had one. Not even if her mother weren't his wife—and William Ravenant wasn't that sort, anyhow," I said.

"No, he wasn't," admitted Dan. "So far as that goes, I know that woman isn't that sort, either. And we have yet to see Olga," he reminded me.

"Dan," I reminded him in turn, "you remember my overhearing, in connection with my own, the name of Smelkoff, that night at Pecici's? I believe this is the chap those fellows meant."

"Ask him," suggested Dan. "I wonder if it's Olga that's crazy?" He went back to the people at the Red House and their affairs. "Madame does look very tragic. Perhaps you're to play keeper here for some lovely lunatic. Nice outlook, isn't it?"

We had emerged upon a long, level strip of beach, which led us to the densely wooded northern tip of the island, beyond which the marshes



stretch into the sea. Following a narrow strip of path, we plunged again into the forest, the track running parallel to a tolerably high bluff that sloped down to a bit of shore thickly covered with driftwood and marsh wrack. An arm of the river swept in from the marsh, forming at high tide a good landing place on the bluff, and at low water a passage through the mud and driftwood. In one spot, the bank rose abruptly into a small hillock, crowned with straggling sea myrtles.

"Why, look here!" exclaimed Dan, hastily dismounting and scrambling down the bluff. "I say, Billy, come down and take a look."

Beneath the hillock a deeply dug cave had been burrowed into the bluff. Heavy timber had been used to prop it up, and a rude but strong, door admitted one to a fairly large front room and a smaller and darker one deep under the bank. The latter room was walled with solid and heavy pine, and both rooms were quite empty save for a rude bench or bunk in a corner, partly covered with drifting sand and leaves.

"I glimpsed the door out of the tail of my eye, as we passed," said Dan, examining the place with interest. "Must be some old fisherman's hut, Billy."

"Must be," I said doubtfully. "It looks more like a pirate's cave to me."

"Stick a few more myrtle bushes around it, shut the door, and one who hadn't been told of the place couldn't find it in a thousand years," said Dan. "See, at high water the river comes within a few feet of it, and even at low tide the marsh hides it completely."

"Nice place to murder somebody," I remarked.

"Or hold 'em for ransom," added Dan, as we remounted.

A mile or so beyond, we came to a small hut perched on the edge of a sugar-cane patch. Its owner, sitting

placidly on the rickety steps, rose and bowed deeply as we rode up.

"Evenin', suhs, evenin'!" touching his grizzled wool, for he wore no hat.

"Evenin', daddy," called Dan, in his friendly voice. "Find us a drink of water, won't you?"

The old man had never been off the island, he told us, as he gave us cool well water in a gourd dipper. It appeared he was perfectly satisfied with his lot, and although quite old, he was astonishingly hale and strong. He had lived alone since his wife's death—he spoke of her with chastened resignation—and he had known my uncle, mentioning him with affectionate reverence.

"Mas' William come en go, come en go, all same like dem swallows," he remarked, chuckling. "Useter talk wid me er heap—me en him been good friends. I nuveh could mek him dig fer gol' dem ol' piruts bury hyuh, en he laff en laff w'en I tell him de place ha'nted. De place am ha'nted. Ain't I see one er dem ghostes wid my own eye no less'n las' month?"

"Ghostes?" cried Dan delightedly. "Oh, Daddy Neptune, where?"

He had been hunting for "fatwood" around by the creek, the old man explained, delighted to have some one to talk to. We mightn't know the place yet, but it was where the creek ran into the marsh by the Little Landing. Hearing oars, and wondering what could be coming to that lonesome place so late in the evening, he had cautiously dropped down into the bushes, unwilling to face "ha'nts." A boat had come in from the marsh creek, and he had seen two of "de wuss-lookin' pussions on y'eth" land, poke around a while, then reënter the bateau and disappear in the marsh whence they had come. He had not seen them again, but, vanishing like "ghostes" as they had, he thought them spirits of those old pirates who, he believed, had in the long ago buried their gold on Lost Island.

"Must have been hunters or fishermen," said Dan incredulously.

"Hunters lan' en buil' fiah; fish'men talks so's you kin unnerstan' 'em," said Neptune obstinately. "Dey ain't sneak round like mink. Dem wus pizen ghostes, talkin' debbil talk, which natchel man can't unnerstan', suh."

As we turned to go, I handed him a quarter, which he accepted with grave thanks, but turned over and over in his hand.

"Long ways fum sto's, boss," he remarked. "You wouldn't mind tekin' back dat quarter en givin' me its wuth in terbacker, would you, suh? Mas' William always brung me terbacker, en I sho' misses it—en him," he added.

Bidding him keep the quarter, and promising to bring him its "wuth" in tobacco in the morning, we rode away, laughing. But gravity fell upon us with the dismal shades of the woods.

"I feel like a comic-opera character who doesn't know the score," complained Dan. "Was that old nigger romancing, or what did he see? Or do people see things, anyhow, on Lost Island?"

"Ghostes," I assured him gravely.

#### CHAPTER IV.

The sun was still high when we reached the Red House and turned the horses over to Sam, who was waiting to receive them. We had enjoyed the ride across the lovely, lonesome island, and the sight of the peaceful house drowsing in the afternoon sunlight dispelled those puzzling and painful thoughts and surmises that had oppressed us. Then, too, there was the prospect of dining with Madame Velmaroff, a prospect delightful to us, for she was one of those haunting women whom one longs to see again.

Smelkoff came out on the breezy veranda. Messieurs had enjoyed their

ride? Yes? And was there anything he, Smelkoff, could do?

"You might tell us if there's any one looking for you," I said directly, turning in my chair to face him. "Perhaps you have in this country relatives of the same name?"

He turned his head slowly, a curious mottled pallor overspreading his bronze face. Putting out a shaking hand, he grasped a chair as if to support himself.

"Monsieur jests!" he said chokingly.

"Perhaps there are other Smelkoffs, other Ravenants," I went on, watching him closely. "Those fellows mightn't have meant you, or me, either, for that matter. But it strikes me as strange that they should have mentioned us both."

"Who? Who? Who?" he croaked like an owl.

"Oh, a tall, stoop-shouldered chap with the skin and eyes of a corpse, and a red-bearded brute with——"

"A scar—a scar from brow to chin, is it not?" finished Smelkoff, in a dying voice.

"Why, yes," I said, astonished. "You know them?"

Trembling, he looked around the cool, wind-swept piazzas and out into the sunlit solitudes beyond, with an agonized stare. Then he staggered, rather than walked, over to me, and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Not a word of this to madame!" he rasped fiercely. "To-night I will come to you, and we will perhaps consider what is to be done. Alas, my God, but Monsieur Roberts must be right, and they have at last found out! And he, our friend, is dead!"

He wrung his hands, tears beginning to course down his dark cheeks.

"Stefan! Why, dear Stefan, what is it?" asked an exquisite voice.

I turned, and saw Her standing in the door, looking at the weeping Smelkoff with her heavenly eyes.

"Mademoiselle Olga!" he stammered, frantically wiping his eyes on his sleeve and making a desperate effort to appear composed.

"I heard your voice as I came downstairs, Stefan. Why is it that I find you weeping?" inquired the beautiful vision, somewhat impatiently. A wrinkle came between her black brows.

"Alas, mademoiselle—I have a pain—a great pain—in the inside of me—and it hurts most vilely—and I weep—because of that pain," lied Smelkoff, with a burning face. "And I have been beseeching messieurs not to mention this pain to madame, who worries about me easily. Is it not so?" he besought us imploringly.

"It is so, quite so," we lied in chorus shamelessly, staring at her.

She was very young—not yet twenty. Parted evenly in the middle, thick, soft black hair, perfectly straight, framed the pearly oval of her face. Rose white, her skin was of a beautiful and transparent delicacy; her arched brows were very black, her curved lips very red; and the deep blue eyes, shaded by black, curled lashes, had, with the innocent directness of a child's, a young and womanly imperiousness, a fine pride. In her plain white frock her slim, straight, boyish body had the ineffable charm of youth and of innocent beauty. She wore her girlhood like a white and stainless flower opening to life its golden heart.

Turning from Stefan, she fixed upon me a glance never to be effaced from my memory—a glance of recognition. Smiling, she held out her hand.

"It is Monsieur Ravanant, I am sure!" she exclaimed.

"It is Will Ravanant," I told her, seizing hungrily upon the small fingers, whose velvet touch awoke in me a strangely new and sweet sensation.

"I rejoice that you have come, Monsieur Rav——"

"Will," I corrected.

"Will," she acquiesced, with an upward glance of friendliness that dazzled me.

And then she glanced at Dan, with evident pleasure, for, like David, Dan is "withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to." Brown, healthy, happy, fair-haired, he has a tenor voice to melt the heart in one's breast, an Irish eye and tongue, and the heart of a child and an Irish child at that.

Smelkoff had escaped into the house, and we three had the wide verandas and the lonesome evening to ourselves. A wonderful charm seemed to envelop the hour and the place, brought thither by the young girl, whose strange situation, combined with her youth and beauty, cast a glamour upon us.

She hoped we would like the island, she said. She was delighted to have us with her, for, in spite of her studies and her music, she had often of late been lonely—perhaps because of dear Monsieur Ravanant's death and the fact that she missed him sadly. He had visited them at least twice a year; one could see that these visits had been the events of the young girl's life. She must have come here when she was a very, very small child, she continued, for this place was home to her, who had no clear recollection of any other. And she loved Lost Island, for she had been very, very happy here—until of late.

I sat and watched her sparkling face, listened to her golden voice, and I knew even then that the Ravanant fate had come upon me. For we love at once and forever; we do not change. Life gives us but one love and no more. Losing that love, we go lonely, as William Ravanant had gone. Our motto is "*Semper Fidelis*," and I was to learn how faithfully the Ravanants follow it. Love had come to me at Lost Island.

I wished she wouldn't be so friendly with Dan, that she would at least make

some slight difference and distinction between us. Dan is my best friend, of course, and I think a great deal of him myself; but I wished she wouldn't be quite so friendly. I wished she wouldn't lavish so much affection, waste so many words, upon Doushka, who had most impertinently leaped into her lap, purring against her arm, even putting up a soft paw and lightly slapping her divine and delicate nose. I wished she wouldn't let her mind dwell upon Smelkoff and his apparent trouble. I wished, in short, that she wouldn't think of anything or anybody but *me!*

"Monsieur Ravenant——"

"Will."

"Will, you and Monsieur Ross——"

"Dan," said the scamp, without batting an eyelid, turning upon a defenseless girl the full battery of a smile that is irresistible.

"One, then, calls young gentlemen by their given names?" she desired to be informed.

"One does, if one wishes to be altogether charming, amiable, and adorable," answered Dan.

"Myself, I have lived here alone, so that I have had not to consider this question. But in my books one does not read that such is the custom," she reflected, a pucker on her ivory forehead.

"Books," Dan explained patiently, "are good enough in their way, but they aren't always a guide for the young, and they're often a nuisance to the old. Life is much more pleasant than reading about it. Believe me," he continued, in his lazy, laughing voice, "when people are young—and good—and beautiful—like us, no prose or poetry ever penned gives more than a shadow of life's real worth-whileness. Come, now! I'll admit that being just us, and here to-day—with you—beats any old book I've ever maundered through, penned by the fogiest and fustiest old genius who ever lived!"

"When people are young—and good, like me; and beautiful, like Mademoiselle Olga; and full of impudence, like you—what you say may be true."

I looked at him reprovingly, but Dan merely grinned.

The girl turned a lovely, perplexed face.

"There is, perhaps, a joke?" she wondered. "Me, I am not clever, and you will excuse that I do not see that joke. For you both *are* young and beautiful—and perhaps good—as he says. It may be that in the wide world outside of my island one speaks so charmingly and with such candor of one's graces. Why is it, then, that you laugh?" And her voice was perfectly sincere!

Dan looked at me agonizedly, his eyebrows running up a signal of distress and defeat.

"Good Lord deliver me, but don't I get it in the solar plexus?" he murmured.

And, "Serve you right!" I hissed in return.

"And what you say is quite, quite true," went on the girl happily, mercifully blind to the sinner's red face. "Never have I read a book that seemed to me so charming as to-day is. When I say to my mother that I am less lonesome now, perhaps she will be less sad. It is of a dreadfulness to be always sad in this so beautiful world; is it not?"

"But surely *you* cannot ever have been sad, really!" I protested. The thought of sorrow upon her young joyousness seemed profanation.

"Perhaps I should have been so, for my mother always is," she said simply. "I have sometimes looked upon it as a fault in myself that always I wish nothing so much as to be just happy, to sing, to laugh. Ah, if I could see her, that loved mother, happy once, I think I should be the merriest person in the world!"

Still stroking Doushka, she fell into a reverie, lifting her face to the sunset.

Her delicate cameo profile was toward me, so that I could gaze at her to my heart's content. Filled with an almost painful rapture, I forgot my loss of estate, the puzzling mysteries surrounding us both, the muffled murmur of unknown, unguessed danger. I could remember only that I was four-and-twenty, and that out of thorny circumstances I had stumbled into a hidden garden where bloomed the rose o' the world. Weighed with a new and pregnant meaning, the words of my uncle's letter came back to me: "Olga is worth all that a man has of truth, of faith, and of honor." And she, perhaps, might need my assistance; she might, in time, even care for me! *Was it for this I had been sent here?*

The young girl evidently knew a little concerning her own history as we did. Cut off from outside curiosity, it had never occurred to her to wonder at her isolation. Her business heretofore had been simply to grow and be glad.

"You will please to excuse me now," she said, turning to us and gently putting Doushka out of her lap. "This hour is the favorite of my mother, and always I sing for her at evening those songs she seems to love."

A little later we heard the sound of her piano and her beautiful, clear voice singing a pretty and plaintive folk song.

"Can you make out what she's singing?" asked Dan, listening.

But both words and music were foreign to us. All her songs that first evening were strange to me, by which I lost something; for it is the old, familiar songs, the old, loved music, that have become, as it were, a part of life, that have power most deeply to touch the heart.

"I wish she'd sing 'Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms' or 'Lochaber No More,'" I murmured.

"I wish she'd say in plain English who and what she is," said Dan bluntly.

"I can't help it, Billy—my nose for news is itching. It's a pestiferous itch, and I'll go crazy unless I find out something definite. Nothing but the fact that I'm your guest and your friend keeps me from poking around. We newspaper chaps are like that.

"Who are they? What are they? Where did they come from? And what are they doing here?" he went on. "I want to shake his story out of your square-tressed major-domo. I feel like backing even madame into a corner, demanding, 'Your story or your life.' I want to kiss the white hand of beautiful Olga—who, by the way, isn't at all crazy, Billy—and implore her to ease my curiosity—if she can. It's indecent of me, but I can't help it."

"Oh, yes, you can," I told him determinedly. "For me, I don't give a damn who she is, or why she's here. She's herself, her own beautiful self, and that's enough for me. And I guess it's got to be enough for you, too. Sabe, Dan?"

"I sabe," grumbled Dan, rubbing his nose. "You cold-blooded, torpid-livered, jellyfishy lump of noninquiry, I sabe!"

Sam came from around a corner of the house and sat solemnly upon a lower step of the veranda, his wrinkled black face set in righteous disapproval of everything and everybody.

"Marse Billy," he began, with the air and tone of a martyr at the stake, "co'se I gwine stick by you, suh—you ain't fitten ter be lef' lone in dis kind er place—but I wants ter ask whut kind er niggahs dey got hyuh, anyhow?"

"I jes' wanten be pleasin' ter one er dem gals—dem plumb-fool gals dey got in de kitchen—jes' actin' like a gent'-man ter er lady, Marse Billy—en she upped wid 'er fist en busted me spang in de face. She suttinly done it, suh. Got er arm like er mewl's laig, too. 'All two bofe er dem gals—en dey pa en ma befo' 'em—is nachef-bawn idjits. Ax



'em er question, en dey looks at you like rabbit in de corn patch.

"Don't like de place nohow," he went on growlingly, regarding us with an aggrieved and injured air. "Got er white man wid hair cut like de front-garden grass, en call him 'Smellcoffee!' Name er Gawd, Marse Billy, what you want tekin' up wid people called like dat? Niggers whut crack you in de haid fust time you try ter please 'em, en buckra called 'Smellcoffee!' Le's we-all go back home, Marse Billy, chile. Dis ain't no kind er place for we-all."

"You can go back when Mr. Dan goes, Sam," I told him soothingly. "As for me, I've got to stay, you know. I dare say I'll manage to scrabble along without you. I wouldn't keep you for worlds when you want to leave."

Leaping to his feet, Sam stood glaring at me.

"Is you run plumb crazy, Marse Billy?" he demanded furiously. "No, suh, no, suh, you can't run me off like dat! Ef you got ter stay, I got ter stay. I been mindin' you since yo' pa died, en it was me dusted yo' britches when you was er pindlin' boy. I got you 'most raised now, en I gwine stay twell I tu'ns you ovah ter yo' wife some er dese days, en lef' somebody else worry wid you."

"All right, stay," I agreed resignedly.

As he stalked off, muttering indignantly to himself, Dan looked after him tolerantly.

"Awful old tyrants, aren't they?" he laughed. "January's worst threat is that he's going to leave, and mine is to try to make him do it. Worse than the itch at times, but faithful old souls."

Dressing for dinner, we blessed the conservatism of my aunt and January, who had added our dress suits even for a visit to what they had supposed the wilds of a primitive island. Thanks to them, we could present ourselves at

madame's table clothed and in our right minds.

Clad in somberest black, without a single ornament, madame, in spite of her frailness and pallor, was beautiful and regal. And Olga, in her white frock, with a string of pearls around her white, white throat, resembled the rose in her hair.

It gave one a sense of being in a dream to sit, in this far, inaccessible island, at a faultlessly appointed table sparkling with crystal and silver, waited upon by a deft manservant, and conversing with two beautiful, cultured women. This in the Red House, which we had thought given up to rats and bats!

Elizabeth Velmaroff had a fascinating grace of conversation, the art of lightly skimming across the surface of things, bringing up now and then a word pearl suggestive of the depths below. Even her pauses were significant climaxes of speech. She was not, she apologized, familiar with the newest topics, since she had to depend upon such belated books, papers, and magazines as my uncle and Mr. Roberts had been able to get to her. As they could not be left alone on the island, Smelkoff could not be sent to the city. Besides, he was at best a clumsy sailor and never trusted himself to a boat unless he had to. So, although they had a pretty little sailboat, they were really prisoners on Lost Island.

"And I so love the water!" exclaimed Olga impulsively. "Mother, cannot we sometimes go with Will in his beautiful boat?"

Madame Velmaroff looked up sharply, and of a sudden Dan and I felt our ears burn. Retribution was upon us.

"Monsieur Ravenant will be so kind as to take us some day, I dare say," she said, with a distinct stress upon the "monsieur."

"Before Dan leaves us, so that he,



too, may be with us! Oh, but that will be charming!" cried the delighted girl.

"Dan!" exclaimed madame, with a note of reproof and inquiry. "Why, Olga!"

"They are wishful to that effect—that I should call them by their names," explained the young girl simply. "I thought it not such a custom as I had read of, but it is of a pleasantness, and I wished to please them who please me so much. You will permit that I call them thus, yes?"

Dan turned to madame with the smile that seems to subdue all women, and as she met it, she smiled faintly in response.

"We feel like two little boys playing in the Garden of Eden with a dear little girl," he told her gayly. "And we didn't want the snake of convention to enter our paradise," he added.

"The snake is very often a safeguard, nevertheless," said madame thoughtfully. "I think I shall have to ask you to admit him." And she cast upon her daughter an inquiring, loving, and yet anxious glance.

We bowed to her decision, but I said in my heart that to me Olga would ever be Olga. When her blue eyes met mine, my heart gave a delicious upward leap; and once when her hand touched mine, I grew dizzy, and heard Dan's laughing voice and madame's silvery tones roar like water in my ears.

Walking on air, I followed madame upstairs, and Olga sang for us. A chilly hint of autumn breathed in the September night, and a sweet-scented fire of cedar burned cheerfully in the open fireplace. This, with the soft-shaded candles, lighted madame's beautiful room, showing bits of silver and brass and copper, the dull, satiny polish of old rosewood and mahogany, the blended hues of many books, the green of growing plants.

Madame sat back in the shadow, but

young and radiant Olga was in the light; and in that subdued glow, she seemed not so much reality, but rather one of those exquisite visions the hopes of youth and the memories of age evoke from the depths of the heart. I was afraid to take my eyes from her, for fear that in an instant's passing she might vanish like a dream born of the sea and the solitude, and leave me with a heart empty of all save longing for her.

It was Dan who finally maneuvered me out of that enchanted room and propelled me, still in a dream, across the hall. The door shut upon us, he put his hands on his hips and launched into reproaches.

"Idiot!" he abjured. "Unmindful of all the nods and becks and wreathed smiles I've been shying at you, you've kept those unfortunate ladies out of their beds until eleven of the clock!"

"Only eleven?"

"Only eleven, quotha!" mocked Dan. "Ninny, can you get into your triple-plated skull the fact that eleven here equals three o' the morning in town? Furthermore, were you, or were you not, to hold a tryst with Mr. Smell-coffee?"

"Smelkoff?" I repeated vaguely. "Really, I had forgotten him."

"I dare say," agreed Dan significantly.

Disdaining a reply, I went over to the window and leaned like a prisoner against the bars. Bathed in mistiest moonlight lay the deep, sweet garden, sending upward its honeyed odors. Through the trees I could catch a silver gleam of the river, and far across the golden dunes I glimpsed the tossing manes of the intruding white horses of the sea, whose multitudinous murmur filled the still, starry night. I was very young, virgin to life and love, and just across the hall from me was love and beauty and mystery.

Dan laid his hand on my shoulder.

"What a night!" he sighed. "Lord, I wish I could see Angela Pecici again—right here and now! Billy, I've just got to see her again! I never felt like this about any girl before," he confessed shamefacedly, "but she's so direct and plucky and pretty! I dare say I'm a plain, unvarnished garden ass to moon about an Italian girl I've only seen twice. Say, let's go outside and yowl. The spirit moves me."

He reached for the mandolins we had brought along with us, and we stole downstairs, noiselessly unbarred the door, and stepped into the magic of the night, to stand presently under her window.

"Now Bray!" whispered Dan, lifting up his sweet, strong voice:

"I arise from dreams of thee,  
In the first sweet hush of night,  
When the winds are breathing low,  
And the stars are shining bright.  
I arise from dreams of thee,  
And a spirit in my feet  
Leadeth me, I know not how,  
To thy chamber window, sweet."

My heart was in every lovely word. Oh, would she let us know she heard? I had known her in the flesh but half a day; she had lived in the same world with me all her sweet years, and never until now had I beheld her beauty; no far whisper had told my spirit that here, on this ocean island, dwelt that other spirit it had sought these thousand years. For it seemed to me that I had known and loved her before Babylon was or ever Nineveh grew and faded.

"*What are time and place and space to me?*" whispered Love.

And I knew that she was mine, as I was hers, now and forever; and it was right and beautiful and inevitable that I should be here to-night, under her window, singing that I loved her.

"The Bedouin Love Song, now," whispered Dan.

So I sang that I should love her

Till the sun grows cold,  
And the stars are old,  
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfolded.

The casement above us softly opened. She had come to the window! I could see her slim white body against the bars, the slight figure of madame behind her. When the last note ceased, Olga spoke.

"Will!" she called sweetly. "Dear Will, thank you! Never have I heard anything so altogether lovely! Mother"—she turned to madame—"were the nightingales you remember, when you were young, as sweet as this?"

Madame's low reply we could not hear, but it evidently checked the young girl's frank utterance. She moved away from the window, but not before she had thrust her small hand through the bars, dropping a rose at my feet—the pink rose she had worn all that evening. I have it yet. I thought, when I stooped and picked it up, that the Ravenant fortune had been lightly lost for this, a fortune being as a pinch of desert dust weighed in the scales with that priceless rose!

"My dear young friends," said madame gently, "you have given us a very great pleasure. Thank you—and good night."

Upstairs was silence and darkness; but outside I stood in that enchanted garden, with Olga's flower in my hand.

"The ingratitude of that girl!" hissed Dan in my ear. "Wasn't it lovely, dear Will, thank you?" And where was I, I'd like to rise and ask. A fat lot of thanks I get, bawling love songs at midnight, spoiling my throat, while you get roses and raptures! 'Are the nightingales so sweet as William?' Well, not so you could notice it!"

I looked over his head. "Olga, Olga, Olga!" throbbed the night, shone the stars, sang the sea. But Dan tucked

an imperative hand through my arm and led me, unresisting, indoors.

"Come in, you great, beautiful, thundering idiot, come in!" he commanded, pushing me inside and barring the door. "I'll be sworn Smelkoff's waiting to murder you this instant."

We did, indeed, find that patient person waiting in my room, his face a mask of resignation as he glanced at the clock on the dresser.

"Mr. Ravenant," Dan gravely explained, "has an affection of the heart that obliges him to wander outdoors and bay the moon o' nights. This accounts for the tardiness of our appearance, which I trust you will condone."

Smelkoff bowed.

"My desire is to ask of monsieur what he knows of those two persons whom to-day he mentioned, and where he has seen them, and how, and when," he came directly to the point. "I beg of him to be perfectly frank, for it is of the utmost importance."

I explained that chance meeting at Pecici's, when I had heard those two names linked in a fragmentary sentence, and no more. No, I had never seen the men before—knew not who they were or whence they came. But I was certain I should recognize them if I saw them again.

Smelkoff sat for a while in deep and painful thought, his face haggard and drawn.

"I can have no doubt as to their identity," he said musingly. "Evidently they found Monsieur Ravenant's trail. But how? Through one of the two I bribed, I wonder? And they will come. But when? And how many?" Rousing himself, he turned to me. "I observed with pleasure, monsieur, that you came well armed."

"Roberts advised it," I told him. "Besides, I thought there might be some hunting here."

"It is quite likely," agreed Smelkoff. "Only—we will hope not to be the

hunted, monsieur," he ended enigmatically.

"Now, you look here, Smelkoff," said Dan truculently. "This hinting and insinuating has gone about far enough, for me. Say plainly what's up, and why, and you can depend on us to do what's to be done. But deuce take me if I'm going to take blind chances! Who's coming, and what are they, or who, and why?"

"The spies of Sergius Velmaroff," said Smelkoff drearily. "They come—for us."

"Why?" I jerked, for his manner was convincing. No imaginary terror would have brought that look to a man's face; this man *knew*.

"For her whom you know as Made-moiselle Olga," he whispered. "For her—and—and—hers. Always have they hunted us, since the good, the brave, the noble Ravenant snatched us, a prey, from the Bear's jaws and hid us here. He thought us safe. But Sergius must have picked up a clew." He lifted his hands in an attitude of supplication. "All Father," he prayed, "Thou wilt not have forgotten the young, the innocent, the beautiful! Help me to save her, help me to save her! My life, my God, for Olga's!"

"Amen! Ours, too," said Dan, in a low voice.

Profoundly impressed by the solemnity of his manner, I said in a trembling voice:

"Olga? Save Olga? From what? And why?"

"Monsieur," cried Smelkoff vehemently, "it is for this that I, Smelkoff the soldier, am here, a castaway in the midst of the sea, an exile from the unhappy land which I yet love. It is to save Olga that madame flies as a hare before the hounds. Is not this enough?"

"No," snapped Dan. "I want to know why."

Sinking back into a chair, Smelkoff shaded his eyes with his big, burned

hand, and fell to studying me. His face softened into kindness, affection, trust.

"A promise to the dead—the good and holy dead—should be held sacred, should it not?" he asked wistfully.

After a moment's reflection, "Yes," I said. "Provided, of course, that it does not injure the living."

He nodded, his lips forming into a straight, pale line of inflexible determination.

"What you wish to know, I may not tell you—yet," he said. "Monsieur your uncle forbade it. But, foreseeing these troubles approach, he bade me ask you this: You have seen Olga—are you willing for her sake to play the man, without further explanation than that she needs you?"

"Yes," I said, looking directly into his eyes.

Without removing his glance from mine, Smelkoff continued:

"Those two whom you saw are but the tools, the paid instruments, of a higher—and a worse. For Sergius Velmaroff is, I am quite sure, one of the worst men living. For him to find us unprotected means madame's death, perhaps mine—but that I do not fear." He seemed to brush aside all thought of himself with a flick of contemptuous fingers.

"It is Olga—and what is hers—that Sergius wants. It is this that he hunts tirelessly, since Ravenant saved us."

"God aid Ravenant to do so again, if need be!" I said.

"You'll count me in, Billy?" besought Dan, his hand on my knee. "I don't know any more than Adam's pussycat who or what I'm to do or how or when or why I'm to do it, and I won't even ask. But you just whistle, and I'll be there with both feet—and a pair of hands."

"We are not likely to be disturbed immediately, I should say," mused Smelkoff. "But they will come. The lawyer, Roberts, thought they had

found monsieur your uncle—and I, too, now think so."

"Smelkoff," I said in a shaking voice—for here at the Red House, and in the face of this man's earnestness, Roberts' theory did not sound so wild and chimerical to me—"Smelkoff, Roberts thought my uncle—may not have died—naturally."

"It may be true," admitted Smelkoff, with a troubled frown. "But for me, I will hope not. Now let us to sleep. We are all for our little mademoiselle, is it not? So? Then good night, messieurs. A pleasant rest to you!"

When Dan, too, had left me, I went back to the window and looked up at the midnight skies. Even then the weather was changing. The moon was hidden by mounting masses of cloud, and a chill wind crept moaning in from seaward. It seemed to me that the calm face of Solitude had changed, too—had become sly, sinister, foreboding. The woods crowded closer; the voice of the sea carried an ominous undertone.

I crept into my uncle's bed with a rather heavy heart on my first night under the roof of the Red House.

## CHAPTER V.

I awoke to sunlessness and pattering upon the windowpanes, for the clouds that had begun to pile up before dawn heralded the coming of the autumn rains. Dan, downstairs before me, was staring dolefully out of the barred dining-room windows, which framed a wet picture of dripping, rustling palmettos and dun-colored dunes shifting in the rising wind. The house shook and rattled to the thunder of a pounding surf.

Smelkoff, however, appeared more cheerful.

"They are good, these rains," he said. "What serves to keep us in may serve to keep others out."

Madame Velmaroff had been unable

to rise that morning, Smelkoff told us, and as Olga breakfasted with her mother, we did not see her, either. Shortly after we had left the table, we saw Smelkoff, buttoned to his chin in oilcloth, drive off in a farm wagon toward the fields, thus leaving us the house to ourselves.

Tiring of the library, we wandered upstairs, where, with sashes down, Dan released his pigeons, letting them fly about the rooms with soft cooings. One beautiful fellow perched familiarly upon my shoulder.

"That's Swiftwing," Dan said, with an air of great pride. "Two internationals to his credit, and more coming. Great record, isn't it? If I ever was proud of anything, I'm proud of him—eh, beauty?"

We talked pigeon for a while—or, rather, Dan did. Then he wandered over to the old mahogany desk, admired it, and idly began pulling out one small drawer after another. They were quite empty and bare, save a tiny one far back, from which he took a yellowed envelope, tossing it to me.

"Marked 'W. R.' Might be for you," he said.

The tiny slip of paper inside contained a single line:

W.R.- 2ff m-ring s-h. W.R.

"The initials are my uncle's, as well as mine, it is in his writing, and it might be a message," I puzzled. "He wished me to sleep in this room, which was his. So he may have left this in the desk for me to find. What do you make of it, Dan?"

"2ff—two feet left? Left of what, I wonder. What's an 'm-ring,' and what may 's-h' mean?" he mused.

We took pot shots at it for an hour or two, then finally gave it up, replacing the slip in the drawer from which it had been taken.

"Something is two feet left of something else, and, for all of me, it's likely

to remain there," I said. "I never had much of a head for that sort of thing, anyhow."

"I can see a steeple in the daylight or a hole in a ladder myself," murmured Dan regretfully.

The day was interminable. We had a solitary lunch, attended by Sam, whose long-drawn and dismal visage fitly accompanied the weather. At intervals he gave an audible and lugubrious snuffle, handing us innocent ham and eggs with the air of one serving us death warrants.

For several days the wet, wild weather held, rain and gloom and lowering skies keeping us prisoners, until Dan declared he could stand it no longer, and I said I'd rather drown outside than stifle indoors. Nothing but an occasional glimpse of Olga and a word snatched now and then with her had enabled me to keep any manner of patience. For Smelkoff was off at dawn and back at night, too dog weary for anything but sleep, and we had no chance for further conversation with him. Madame's indisposition had settled into a racking neuralgia, which chained her to bed. And of Olga we had but heavenly glimpses as she passed now and then up and downstairs.

"Rain or shine," remarked Dan, looking up from the breakfast table one morning, "I'm off for a ride in the open."

We had the horses saddled and, enveloped in mackintoshes, we presently rode off into the wet woods, breathing in the fresh air with that delight known only to out-of-door spirits compelled for a while to remain shut in.

As we left the gates, Dan paused, ran his hand through his pockets, turned his horse's head, and raced back for the house.

"I'd forgotten old Neptune's tobacco," he explained, as we again rode forward, "and this is the kind of weather when tobacco comforts the



soul of man. Think of the poor old chap wanting and wanting it! I borrowed some from Sam—the rankest cut plug on earth—regular nigger tobacco. It'll be a treat."

The little incident was so typical of Dan that I smiled to myself. He was always running back to get something for somebody whom no one else remembered, always going out of his way to do small kindnesses that couldn't possibly be reciprocated. We had, however, occasion to be glad that Dan had remembered that tobacco.

Although it was near noon, almost a twilight gloom reigned in the wet woods. The ten days' rains had swollen the creek dividing the island, and as we rode over the little bridge, we could hear the yellow water churning and swirling a few feet below, grumbling an angry answer to the hoarse call of the surf.

Old Neptune, "projeckin'" over a driftwood fire in a room reeking of smoke, looked up from a pan of broiled mullet and corn pone to greet us.

"Wisht I got two moufs ter chaw 'em all two bofe at oncet," he said ecstatically, when Dan handed him the tobacco and a small package of striped candy forcibly wrenched from Sam.

Deciding upon the tobacco alone, he asked, between puffs of his corncob pipe:

"Huccome you-all ridin' out in de rain?"

"Oh, we like it," I said cheerfully, for the wet, fresh air, the wild ride, had exhilarated us. "We wanted to projeck around a bit, anyhow."

"Bes' don't projeck roun' de crick en by de San' House on Little Landin'," he advised tersely.

It came to me that he meant the cave, and I asked how long it had been there and who had dug it.

"I foun' it when I got hyuh, en I 'spec' ter lef' it when I gone," he replied. "Mas' William's pa 'lowed dem

piruts dug 'em out. Mas' William hisse'f ketch up de do' en lef' 'em like he foun' 'em. Don't you-all go piddlin' roun' de San' House, chillun. Dem ghostes done come back."

"When?" we exclaimed together.

"I 'low de wedder changin', en I 'spec' I bes' git in de fiahwood," explained Neptune. "De fatwood's plenty by de crick, but I ain't natchelly anxious ter prow' by de San' House, so I go quietlike, crawlin' thoo de bushes by de crick. Mas' Billy, suh, me h'ar riz on me haid. Dem ghostes done come back."

"De wuss-lookin' debbil I eveh did see bin standin' in de San' House do'. Gawd, I bin dat scare' I mos' daid in de bushes! I lay low whiles dey's scufflin' roun', en bimeby dey gits in de boat en losses deyse'fs in de ma'sh. Den I come home, en I ain't done oveh de scare yit."

Dan and I looked at each other, startled, for this was news.

"But nobody passed up the river by the Red House, Neptune," I objected.

"Dey ain't dreamin' er de Red House," he replied. "You don't got ter go by de river ter reach Little Landin'. You kin cut thoo de ma'sh from one side, en cut thoo de crick from de othah. You's fergittin' dat, chile."

"Dey comed from de ma'sh," he ruminated. "Mas' Billy, it's er-comin' oveh me dat if dem ain't ghostes, dey's somepin gwine on oveh yander at de Shell Hammock, en dat's whah dey comed from."

Shell Hammock, he informed us, was a small island in the middle of the marshes, through whose winding creeks one approached it only at high water. Not half a mile in extent, it contained a few stunted trees, so bent and twisted from the wind that one failed to see them over the marsh; it had, too, a small spring of brackish water. Used many years ago as a night

camp by a few deep-sea fishermen, it had since their time been deserted, given over to terrapin and water birds. Parched and miserable, it was a furnace under the tropical sun, a prey to the wind and the sea.

It was imperative that we should find out, and as quickly as possible, who or what had been haunting the Little Landing. Alarmed by Smelkoff's vague hints of Olga's danger, we were ready to leap to the wild conclusion that some of those visionary enemies he dreaded had discovered the hidden Sand House, and were preparing to use it as a base of operations.

It was impossible to reach the place on horseback without being discovered; we decided to leave the mounts with Neptune and approach it afoot. If we had not returned within a reasonable time, Neptune was to ride for Smelkoff.

"If dem is ghostes, how you 'spec' ter wrestle wid 'em?" asked the old negro curiously. "Bullet ain't tetch spook."

Told that we believed these ghosts to be very much alive, the old man straightened himself. He wasn't afraid of anything he could knock on the head, but he gave a wide and respectful berth to "ha'nts" and spooks.

As we were not to return to the Red House for some hours, Neptune hospitably shared his fish and corn bread with us; and very good fare we found it, eaten with fingers and washed down with well water from his gourd dipper. Then Neptune piloted us a part of the way, returning to the cabin to await us.

Dan and I parted within half a mile of the Sand House, I moving in one direction, he in another. As I made my way cautiously forward, I was pleased and excited at what seemed a definite adventure at last. The sodden grasses deadened all sound of my approach; the wet bushes shook their

heavy burden of raindrops in my face. Only in the occasional open spaces could one catch a glimpse of a dark sky, heavy with clouds.

I had got within sight of the hillock when I dropped flat in the bushes, as Neptune had done, peering through the thick coverts, my heart pounding against my ribs. *The boat had come back!*

It had evidently been at the Little Landing for some time, for the man who stood on the muddy and slippery bank was about to shove off, in obedience to the orders of another in the prow. The boat, an ordinary bateau with two sets of oars, contained three men, rascally looking enough to justify Neptune's fears, unused as he was to such countenances.

Intent upon their own business, sure of being unobserved, they never glanced at the creek banks; and, anxious to overhear what was being said, I ventured to crawl closer.

"A good place," grunted the fourth man, shoving off the boat. "The one place nobody knows of," he added.

He spoke in coarse Italian, and I had some difficulty in understanding his patois.

"Give the girl the small room, as I said before," said the fellow in the prow. "Two of you can guard the place, while the rest of us attend to the other end of the business."

"It's a pretty chamber for a pretty lady, captain," snickered the third man, tall, powerfully built, snaky-eyed, hawk-nosed, a fit gift for the hangman. "I always admired her, me."

"Well, you'll be her cavalier in a week at the latest, Guido," grinned the captain, as they rowed off.

Making for the marsh, the boat disappeared in one of the green waterways, the spear-bladed grasses closing over it.

I lay still for some time, then slipped

from my hiding place and sped for Dan.

"Italians," he whispered, as I came up. "What the deuce do Italians want here? And why should they be crazy enough to chuck Olga—if it's Olga they're after—into the Sand House? No, Billy, those fellows don't dream of the Red House seven miles away. They think this is a Lost Island in dead earnest, and they're up to something that doesn't concern us."

"But there's a woman in it, and she's in trouble—or she's going to be—and we'll have to take a hand, of course," I said.

"Didn't I have a hunch there'd be doings in this little pleasure resort?" exulted Dan, to whom the thought of a shindy was as water to the thirsty. "And yet if I went back home and reported it, I'd get fired for plain lying," he added mournfully.

"Who's going into that Black Hole in the Sand House, and why, and when?" I wondered, as we tramped forward. "It can't be any one at the Red House, and perhaps it's nothing at all to be alarmed about—but those fellows are a tough-looking proposition, aren't they?"

"That Guido'd certainly be an ornament to a jail," agreed Dan. "A stout steel veil in front of his face would agree with his style of beauty."

"Well, we'll watch the place the best we can, and if they try to put a woman in it, we'll take a hand," I said.

"Sounds good to me," said Dan gayly. "The curtain's rising—two ladies in distress, two gallant knights to the rescue, a bunch of comic-opera Italians, other hypothetical gentlemen presumably foreign, and the devil to pay generally!"

He began to whistle "Garryowen" under his breath, the gay fighting music suiting his young and joyous face.

"We've got our work cut out for us, in that event," I agreed, cheerfully

enough. "However, let's get back before Neptune stampedes and scares Smelkoff into a dozen Russian fits."

"Did you see dem ghostes?" demanded Neptune, who had been anxiously waiting for us.

"We did; and they're alive, and going to use the Sand House for their own ends—and maybe other people's, too," said Dan.

Sitting around Neptune's fire, we decided upon our course. Neptune was to watch the place and report to us, one of whom would come to him daily. If anything untoward occurred, he was to come to the Red House and ask for us. He cheerfully agreed, peace having covered him with her mantle when he had found that the "ha'nts" were men of flesh and blood like himself.

"Dey mus' be come from Shell Hammock," he remarked. "'Tain't no way ter it 'cept thoo de ma'sh at high water, or we-all could fly roun' en find out. I gwine keep me eye open, chilluns. I ain't blin' yit."

"I feel as if I'd been here ten years, instead of a little more than ten days," remarked Dan, as we swung homeward.

We had spent considerable time both at Neptune's and at the Sand House, and the early dusk was upon us as we entered the home gate, where, looming like a glistening mackintoshed ghost, we found Smelkoff patiently awaiting us.

"I grow old, messieurs, and the old cherish foolish fears for the young," he said, in his melancholy voice, his heavy boots crunching the rain-soaked shell path as he walked beside my horse. "It is well said that to dwell in solitude such as this one must be very wise or very foolish."

We were glad enough, after a needed rubdown, to stretch luxuriously in dry clothes before a snapping fire in the dining room. And Olga dined with us,

making the simple meal a godlike feast with her bright presence.

"Mother said I seemed of a weariness, and that I should for a space chatter with you," she said happily. "She sent me from her to rest us both, she said." Her innocent glance roved over us approvingly. "Young people are 'so much more beautiful than the old," she said thoughtfully. "How sad to think that we shall grow old—be no longer of a rosiness and pleasing, as you are, but full of mournful silences, of wrinkles, of graying hair, like Stefan and my poor mother! I beheld not the young before you came, and I did not know youth was so beautiful.

"Come away from the fire! You are both, oh, of such a redness!" she entreated anxiously.

And without looking at each other, we dutifully drew back our chairs.

Olga played hostess with a pretty dignity enchanting to behold. Every line of her spoke of race and breeding. This was no rustic maiden, but a fairy princess in exile. There dwelt in her glance something at once free and exalted, and her face was a blend of passion and purity—not the cold and easily soiled purity of snow, but the untouchable, unquenchable purity of fire.

Delighting in our youth, she showed us her heart, the heart of an unspoiled and heavenly child. And we lavished upon her in return the reverent, passionate admiration all clean-minded youth bestows upon the opening rose of girlhood.

"I wish," said Dan, looking at her wistfully, "I wish that Angela Pecici were here this minute!"

He had spoken as if to himself, but Olga, overhearing, turned quickly. Red and stammering, Dan muttered something about a girl we both admired and hoped to see again.

"Ah, so!" nodded Olga, rounded chin on slim hand: "And the eyes of mademoiselle," she inquired, "are they but

blue, like yours and mine, or of a bigness and brownness, like those of—of Monsieur Will?"

"They are blue and beautiful, like yours and mine," said Dan mendaciously; "infinitely to be preferred to the bigness and the brownness of Billy's. Bill has the common or garden eye, but yours—and mine—and Angela's—are more heavenly."

"Such is not the opinion of me," demurred Olga. "But I wish," she continued, "that there were some girls that I knew, that I could be friends with. I think I should so love girls!"

"I do myself," said Dan, laughing. "And the girl who wouldn't love you in return, Mademoiselle Olga, I'd quit loving on the spot."

"And you, Monsieur Will, is it that you also will love many girls?" asked Olga directly.

"Not very many," teased Dan. "Billy's faithful to one—at a time."

The faintest wrinkle came to Olga's brow. She rose and shook out her skirts lightly.

"It is *horrid* of him," she said. "It comes to me that some of those books I read must be of a truthfulness, and men are very unfaithful, is it not? And I have to say to you good night, mes-sieurs. My mother will be needing me now."

She whisked out of the room, leaving me staring after her with a rueful countenance.

"Why—why——" I stammered.

Dan began to chuckle.

"Billy," he said, leaning forward and regarding me intently, "they're all alike in some things, aren't they?"

"Who are all alike, and what are they alike in?" I wondered.

"Billy," said Dan pityingly, "did you hear me say some time ago that I could see a hole in a ladder?"

"I believe I did." I murmured, staring at him.

"Well," said Dan, laughing, "I begin

to believe you can't. Nor a steeple in daylight, either, for that matter."

## CHAPTER VI.

"You, Smelkoff, Mr. Ross, Sam, and I," I checked off on my fingers. "That makes four able-bodied men. I don't suppose old Neptune could hit a haystack flying, but we can count him in, too. The two old negroes on the place are useless, but how about those two husky daughters of theirs, Ann and 'Melia'?"

"They'd run from their shadows," said Dan contemptuously, and Smelkoff, walking up and down the library, whither we had called him, agreed. We had decided to tell him at once about the Italians at the Sand House, and as soon as Olga was safely upstairs, he had been called into the library. He received our news as one who is bitten by a rattlesnake.

"What!" he almost screamed. "The Sand House! Oh, my God, you will not mean the Sand House!" And bounding from his chair, he began to walk up and down the room, in violent agitation.

"Draw danger from yet another source upon us?" he went on. "No, no, no! What to me are Italians and their devil doings? Let them kill each other, if they will! What to me is anything or anybody save madame and the little mademoiselle? Let whoever or whatever comes to the Sand House—a curse upon them, meddlers!—take care of themselves!"

"Say you so, friend?" asked Dan ominously, his eyes beginning to sparkle with anger. "All right, skulk. I dare say we two white men can manage without you."

Smelkoff stopped in his walk and wheeled around.

"God forgive me!" he groaned. "Monsieur, you speak just reproaches to me, Smelkoff, once a soldier. But

of a truth I dread drawing upon the defenseless ones beneath this roof any further ills. My life is a barrier for them. For that reason only I seek to guard it."

"I think I understand your feelings, Smelkoff," I said gently. "And I confess I don't hanker after a horde of Italians at our heels, either. But if there's a woman in the case, why, of course we'll have to stand by her. Those fellows look capable of any crime."

Smelkoff sank into a chair and pondered deeply. He seemed to long, and yet to dread, to confide in us. Presently, having made up his mind, he turned to me.

"It is, perhaps, time that I should speak of something," he said thoughtfully. "Who knows what may happen now? And I have that which I would show to you, that which should be in Ravenant hands should aught happen to madame or to me."

Drawing from an inside pocket of his belted blouse a small, flat wallet, he handed me a folded slip of paper. I went over to the light and read its single sentence:

W.R.- 2fl m-ring s-h.W.R.

With a sense of stupefaction, I stared at Smelkoff. This was the same cipher Dan had found in the mahogany desk.

"Impress indelibly upon your memory, monsieur, the message your uncle sends to you in this paper," said the solemn voice of Smelkoff. "Say to yourself: '*Two feet to the left of the myrtle ring at the Sand House.*'"

Dan opened his blue eyes very wide and rumped the fair, curling hair on his forehead. Very softly he began to whistle to himself "Garryowen."

"So that's what the slip upstairs meant!" I said, drawing a long breath. "But I'm all in the dark as to what's in the myrtle ring, Smelkoff."

"What is there is there," said Smelkoff vaguely. "It is, after all, safe.



Who should guess it? Let us not worry our minds about it, monsieur. Only, we will watch—and kill, if necessary," he added calmly.

"Kill? Not so you can notice it," I said flatly.

"There are," said Dan mildly, "no stiffs to my account, so far. I'll knock, or be knocked, for a lady in distress. But I will neither, kill nor be killed for a rascally bit of paper."

Smelkoff threw up his hands.

"When we—escaped," he said unwillingly, "we gave to Monsieur Ravenant certain papers—and other things we managed to bring with us. These things are Mademoiselle Olga's—and it is these Sergius Velmaroff seeks."

And of a sudden he began to laugh soundlessly, ferociously, his shoulders shaking, his features twitching.

"If he but knew!" he gloated, in a rasping whisper. "Eh, good God, if Sergius knew! And he will never know! Ravenant is dead. Madame knows not, nor Olga. But we three in all the world know that the Velmaroff jewels, the jewels before which the czar's pale, lie under the sea myrtles beside the Sand House."

"Why, it seems to me I read something once about some great lost Russian jewels," said Dan, astonished. "Something about a great pigeon-blood ruby, and a rose diamond called 'Flower of Allah,' was it not?"

"By the Sand House—by the Sand House!" whispered Smelkoff. "He would give his soul for them, Prince Sergius," he muttered. "It is for them he wishes Mademoiselle Olga. They would fall into his hands together. See, now, why I was as one mad when you spoke of strangers—and such strangers—at the Sand House!"

"Holy St. Peter!" gasped Dan. "Why, a king's ransom is under those myrtles!"

"It's plain that a watch must be kept upon the place," I said.

We discussed the advisability of removing the jewels, but Smelkoff demurred. For one thing, he refused to have them under the same roof with him—the risk was too great. I thought, too, that we might be disturbed in the midst of digging for them, or at least leave some trace of our presence to alarm our unwelcome visitors or to bring them upon us—a thing to be avoided. There was, too, a certain grim humor in the situation; for we proposed to allow those bandits—such we agreed they were—to camp upon that for which they would most cheerfully have slit one another's throats.

But in the meantime we had no report from Neptune. Day followed day, and yet he had seen nothing. The Sand House was empty and deserted.

And then the weather cleared, and the damp woods blazed with golden-rod and were purple with starry asters and orange with milkweed, above which hosts of red butterflies hovered. A vine with delicate lilac blossoms threw its fragile arms about every tree and bush, and the Virginid creepers strangling the oaks were scarlet and gold. Gums and sumacs and scrub oaks blazed against a dense green background of live oak and pine; and in the Red House garden the drowned roses revived and rioted in a carnival of color.

In peaceful monotony day followed day. Madame had been able to creep downstairs again, a little, beautiful ghost. Olga, from whom we had most carefully concealed all sign of anxiety, was with us now a goodly portion of her time, discovering daily to us new perfections—a delightful inconsistency, a pretty, girlish naughtiness, little flashes of a proud, bright spirit that enchanted us.

In the idyllic days we began to think that we had been foolishly and need-

lessly alarmed, and I think we rather laughed at ourselves for the fears we had entertained. The evil faces seen at the Sand House seemed but faces in a dream.

Madame seeming to wish me with her, I spent many days in the beautiful room upstairs, the room William Ravenant had lovingly and carefully planned and furnished for her, lending to her prison as much of beauty as he could. We were for the most part silent companions, for I am, I suppose, of a rather slow and reticent nature. I think she hesitated to speak of herself, knowing that between us lay a gulf of years and tears and tragedy. Perhaps, too, her generosity disliked to burden my youth with her sorrow.

Often, turning my head suddenly, I found her watching me with wistful intensity, and I knew from the expression of her beautiful eyes that she was comparing me with that other William Ravenant who had given her the service of his loyal life. It was not difficult, in her presence, to understand why he had done so, and counted himself fortunate for the chance. At once timid and most fearless, she who shuddered at a mouse could face death smiling; delighting, in sweet humility, to yield to what was noble, she was adamant to evil. One saw plainly from whom Olga derived that passionate and spiritual nature of hers.

Olga came downstairs one morning with her face shining with joy.

"To-day is *my* day!" she cried. "I am eighteen! I am eighteen!"

The breakfast table was ablaze with pink roses, and madame had discarded her somber dress for one of glimmering gray.

"Once a year," she said, smiling, "she will have it so."

Smelkoff, in a new blouse, waited upon us with a cheerful and serene countenance. He, too, had laid aside sorrow for the day.

Holding out her small hand, the young girl called attention to a signet ring of curious and beautiful workmanship, evidently very ancient, for the pure, fine gold had worn thin. On the flat front was a heraldic device.

"It has always been given to the eldest daughter of the house upon her eighteenth birthday," said madame, adding, with a sigh? "Olga is the last."

But Smelkoff looked up with sudden passion, and with a kindling face.

"No!" he said, with that strange and yet respectful familiarity of his. "Let us not say that our little mademoiselle is the last of the old line, but the beginning of a new one, and a happier."

"Amen," said madame gently.

"Let us not, then, be so solemn!" besought Olga, in her soft, rich voice. "I would have you remember only that I am eighteen—and Olga."

We spent that golden day in the garden, in the first clear sunshine we had had for some time. Madame sat in a rustic seat beneath a magnolia, a silvery scarf upon her white hair, my Uncle William's cat in her lap, her thin white hand on the beast's silky head. Olga, a rose in her hair, leaned against her mother's knee. A little apart, Dan sat silent, his hands behind his head, staring into the blue vault above.

"I think you will be wishing for Mademoiselle Angela, is-it not?" asked Olga unexpectedly.

Dan reddened under his tan, but turned his blue eyes upon her honestly.

"Yes, I do," he admitted truthfully. "I think she's a dear and lovely girl, and I'm sure you'd be perfectly delighted with her. I was wishing she was here with us. It's such a perfect day."

Olga turned the blue wonder of her gaze upon me.

"And you, also, wish for that so charming Angela?" she asked seriously.

I hadn't a thought for Angela, or anybody else—save Olga herself. But

she had wished for girl friends, and I thought she'd like Angela.

"I do if you do," I said, smiling. "I think you'd like her, as Dan says, for she seemed to us both very lovely and good and brave."

"It is very, very strange," said Olga petulantly. "Always have I wished to know girls, and what you say of this one I have dreamed that girls must be. Why, then, is it that I feel I should not wish to have this so lovely one here, that she would be to me no pleasure?" Her face was perplexed, her voice a trifle impatient.

Madame made no reply, only watched the young girl strangely.

"Let us forget Angela and everybody else to-day, save you," I entreated, leaning toward her. "We will remember only that you are eighteen—and Olga."

"Oh, but yes!" she agreed quickly, her brow clearing. "Do not, as you say, remember anything—or anybody—else, Monsieur Will. That, of a truth, will please me!"

Still with that strange regard, madame sat and watched her. Doubt, fear, wonder and—it seemed to me—a dawning relief, a growing pleasure, shone in that long, mild glance. I caught a fleeting glimpse of Dan's face, full of a curious comprehension, a complete sympathy, before he turned his head aside. And I felt that something was happening here and now, something that interested me vitally, big, momentous, of whose meaning I was not as yet aware.

We dined together, and afterward, in the flickering shadows, Olga was singing "The Last Rose of Summer," while outside in the autumn night the garden spent itself in one last glorious riot of beauty and fragrance before the winds ravaged it. When I recall that evening, I still see Olga, in the blue dress whose short sleeves showed her bare, beautiful arms; I still hear the

lingering loveliness of that poignant music, while the white hair of madame dropped over her folded hands; and then Smelkoff, a shadowy beckoning presence at the door.

Murmuring an excuse, I rose unwillingly enough and followed him.

"The old Neptune wishes to speak with you, Monsieur Will," he said, in a low voice. "I have brought him into the library to await you, and he will give to you yourself his message," he said.

Although his voice was quite steady, even in the dusky passage one could discern that his face was very pale.

"Mas' Billy, suh," cried Neptune excitedly, the moment I appeared, "two er dem debbils is in de San' House—en dey got er gal wid 'em!"

He had made the daily visit as promised, he said. Late that afternoon he had found several men at Little Landing and, watching from the underbrush, had seen them take a young girl from the boat. Neptune could not, of course, understand what had been said, but they had seemed to threaten her roughly, and she had answered with spirit. After a long parley, they had left her inside the Sand House with two men as guards, and had rowed off again into the marsh. The old negro had waited for a space—"ter mek my heart stop thumpin'," he said; then he had crept back through the darkening woods and made his way to the Red House.

Very much excited, he begged to be allowed to stay with us; he didn't like such neighbors as those at the Sand House, and we might need him. After cautioning him to be silent, I sent him to the servants' quarters to be fed and lodged, while Smelkoff went to call Dan.

Then we three, with lighted pipes, sat in the library to consider what was to be done. Now that danger was actually upon us, I think we were rather

relieved to face the music and have done with it. We couldn't, of course, consider for a moment leaving any friendless girl in the power of those ruffians. As it was, her danger turned us sick.

"We'll have to tell madame," I said finally. "I'll see her myself, and get her to keep Olga in her own room. Sam and Neptune will stay here on guard. You can tell Sam to saddle the horses now, Smelkoff. We're going to bring that girl, whoever she is, home with us."

"But of course," said Smelkoff quietly, tightening his belt.

"Revolvers are better at short range or in a scuffle," said Dan mildly, as we went upstairs together, I to speak to madame, Dan to get weapons.

Madame turned pale and faint at the first mention of strangers on Lost Island, but grew calmer and more composed as I hastily explained their probable nature and errand.

"Oh, Will, what is it?" asked Olga, coming hastily out of her mother's bed-chamber.

"Some men have brought to the Sand House on Little Landing a young girl, whom Will is going to bring here to me, my darling," said madame soothingly.

And even in the tensify of that moment I noted with a thrill of joy that they had both called me "Will."

When I turned back at the door to assure her that no danger threatened her, madame lifted her head royally.

"If it did," she said, "we should face it, rather than allow a girl to remain in the Sand House to-night."

Her face, lost its calm fixity and, turning to me, she held out her hands.

"Hurry, Will, hurry! Even now you may be needed, prayed for! Oh, for mercy's sake, ride fast! I shall remain here and pray."

I left Neptune sitting against her door and Sam in the downstairs hall,

the negro women crouching wide-eyed in a corner.

Riding out into the darkness, we three men turned our faces to the shifting dunes and the dark woods.

## CHAPTER VII.

It had taken Neptune some time to get us word of what was passing in the Sand House, and some time must necessarily elapse before we could reach it; there was need of haste.

Smelkoff, knowing these paths like the palm of his hand, forged ahead, we keeping at his horse's tail, riding almost recklessly, while the damp, soft sea wind rushed over us. It was one of those autumn nights when the moon rises late, and the sky was lit only by the incalculable host of the stars; the air was full of the rustling of leaves and of the lipping whisper of waves mouthing the beach line. Past the fields we raced, and over the little bridge, which shook to the flying hoofbeats. At Neptune's deserted cabin, we left the horses and plunged afoot into the forest, creeping along the creek margin. We moved cautiously, afraid of giving warning of our approach and thus allowing them to fly with their prey into the impenetrable marshes or to hide in the black depths of the underbrush and so escape.

Impeded by the briery ropes of smilax and blackberry brambles, the lithe, strong creepers and jasmines, we moved forward as rapidly as the ground permitted; but our progress was necessarily slow, and the midnight moon was rising before we came in sight of the Sand House, beneath whose heavy plank door crept a thin pencil of light. Other than this was neither sight nor sound of life stirring within. But from the forest a whippoorwill—surely the loneliest bird voice under the stars—called plaintively; the creek waters lapped against the shell bank,

and, bowing to the wind, the long plains of the marsh unrolled under the rising moon.

We three drew together for a last whispered conference. We could not know with certainty just how many persons were in the Sand House, nor what means of defense they possessed, though we took it for granted they were not short of knives.

We had decided to stand beside the door and demand entrance when a sound arose that drove the blood back to our hearts—a girl's voice, crying shrilly upon her Maker.

"Oh, God!" it cried through the startled night. "Oh, God, save me, save me!"

It died away into a strangled moan, as if a hand, a strong and brutal hand, had been laid upon the screaming mouth.

With a lionlike roar, Smelkoff hurled himself bodily upon the door, we beside him.

"Open!" shouted Dan, as the door groaned on its hinges beneath the pressure of my shoulder.

A sudden and stunned silence fell upon the Sand House, as if those inside had been struck motionless with the surprise of so quick a response coming out of the night in answer to that dreadful cry.

"Open!" yelled Dan again.

Again I braced my shoulder against the door and, unable to withstand a pressure learned on the gridiron, snapping on its rusty hinges, it toppled inward, bearing us with it and imprisoning the man who had stood just behind it. As I scrambled to my feet, I could hear him swearing horribly, his oaths mingled with groans as he complained of his broken ankle.

A revolver barked, the bullets spitting by us viciously; and as we jumped sidewise to escape, the remaining man rushed forward in an effort to gain the open and the marsh.

"Stop him!" screamed Smelkoff, leaping forward in pursuit, only to fall prostrate across the man whom the door had felled and who had by this time, in spite of his injury, got to his knees.

Dan whirled and raced for the flying figure; but, impeded by Smelkoff and the fury beside him, he lost time. Before he had got outside the door, the fugitive had gained the landing and the boat. A second more and he was out in the creek, paddling furiously for the marsh.

"By-a God, you pay-a for dis!" grated the other fellow.

I could see him, in the uncertain light, dragging himself forward to the wall, in an effort to rise. Avoiding him, I made for the inside room, stumbling over a fallen body—presumably the girl's. It gave me a hideous shock as my foot struck against her soft and yielding flesh. I relit the lamp still smoking on the table, and its light fell upon a weird scene. Smelkoff was standing by the wall, calmly regarding the villainous countenance of the man Guido, crouching almost at his feet. As I emerged from the inner room, outlined against the light behind me, Guido turned his eyes toward me, and a filthy oath escaped him. With a lightning movement of his wrist, a stiletto hurtled toward me—and missed. Smelkoff, with a snarl of anger, brought down the butt of his pistol with a deadly force upon the fellow's temple, and he went down like a stone, blood issuing from his mouth.

Dan, who had come in with a crest-fallen face, stared down at the fallen man lying upon his back, a ghastly sight in the lamplight.

"Dead," said Smelkoff indifferently.

We were almost afraid to look at the girl lying with her face almost buried in the sand floor, so like death she seemed, unrecognizable, disheveled, her clothing in strips, her long, unbound



hair veiling a face disfigured with dirt. She stirred and moaned, and when she lifted her distorted face, staring at me with eyes wild with terror, I thought with a glow of righteous satisfaction of Guido's broken skull.

I got my arms under her and lifted her to her feet, and when it seemed to dawn upon her frenzied mind that ours were not the faces of her dread, her body trembled in shuddering sobs. Slipping from my supporting arm, she fell upon her knees and, with hands folded and eyes upraised, began to babble. With smarting eyes, I turned my head aside. The poor thing was praying. We did not like to look at the girl in her present condition. It seemed shameful to witness.

Dan, with a gray face, turned over the dead man with his foot and nodded to Smelkoff. Heels and shoulders they carried him outside, and a dull splash told where the wretch had found a resting place.

"It is time to be gone—the quicker, the better," said Smelkoff anxiously. "Madame is alarmed. Let us make haste to reassure her."

"And the other devil is making for his friends," said Dan, groaning. "I think I winged him when I fired after the boat, Billy, but I can't be sure. Oh, good Lord! To let him slip through our fingers! Was anything ever so provoking?"

"What is to be will be," said Smelkoff resignedly. "Only let us, in God's name, leave this devil's den and go home."

He started off, Dan and I following with the girl between us. In grim silence, we stumbled through the woods, now lighted by the high full moon, the half-crazed girl moving as one in a nightmare, still murmuring scraps of prayer. She asked no questions, made no attempt to speak coherently; she moved mechanically, as we directed her steps, half carrying her between us, her

fallen hair veiling her ghastly face, from which her eyes gleamed wildly.

At Neptune's cabin, Dan helped put her in front of me on my horse, and, he and Smelkoff riding on either side, we turned toward the Red House with this sorry guest, whom we placed in madame's waiting, compassionate arms.

"Oh, poor, poor child!" she cried. "Alas, my God, what fiends have treated her thus?"

In the library we men faced each other disconsolately enough in that black hour before dawn, for one thing, clear as crystal, stared us in the face—the fact that Guido's precious friends would be upon us shortly, demanding toll for his blood.

"I feel horribly guilty for letting the other one get away," groaned Dan, his head in his hands. "Good Lord, I wish I'd had a square chance to plug him! I never knew I was bloodthirsty until to-night."

"You'll have chance to slake it," I said grimly. "He will come back—plenty of him."

Smelkoff raised his head, a strange, far-away look in his eyes, as if that spirit which sometimes takes possession of the people of the far white North were upon him.

"It comes to me that the end approaches, messieurs," he said slowly. "I smell death. Well, we will at least play the man, and God be with the right!"

"I'm going to turn in," said Dan dismally, "and have a nightmare, probably. You go and find out how that poor girl is, Billy."

"She is much better, I think," madame whispered, opening her door in response to my knock. "But she is still perfectly dazed, and she will still hold Olga's hand, afraid to let it go, poor thing! Melia and I bathed her and bound up her hair, and Olga has put her into her own bed."

Madame's face twitched. She drew

me into the room and put her hands on my shoulders.

"My son," she murmured, "thank God all your life you reached the Sand House to-night—in time. She seems to be a gentlewoman, and I think she is very, very lovely. She has been unable as yet to tell me her name or to mention her friends."

As I turned to go, madame leaned forward and kissed me motherly on the forehead.

"For that poor thing's mother," she said slowly, with tears in her eyes.

I thought of the dead beast in the creek, of the other wretch escaped to carry news of us to his friends, but of this I said nothing to the white-haired, weary woman. I was grave and anxious enough as I sought my room, where Dan, comfortable in dressing gown and slippers, awaited me.

"Well, anyhow, we did manage to give a little surprise party to those two at the Sand House to-night," he commented, as we talked the affair over in low tones. "Glad the crabs have one of 'em. Wish they had the other. Bad job, that one getting off."

"Worse than bad," I agreed, from my pillow. "Three women in the house, and only four men to cope with a possible dozen bandits—for that's what they are, no less."

"Oh, but *we're* white men," said Dan airily, adding, with his invincible grin: "Let's don't worry too much, Billy. We're a match for all of 'em." And whistling "Garryowen" under his breath—a sign that Dan's spirit had regained its courage and composure—he sauntered off to bed.

I snatched a few hours of sleep haunted by feverish dreams, and woke to a sunshiny day full of fleecy, scurrying clouds and of frolicsome winds scattering rose petals over the garden paths. The sight of Dan's bright and buoyant face, too, braced me like a

tonic. Before it, even the gray and melancholy Smelkoff smiled faintly.

We were waited upon at breakfast by one of the frightened negro maids, who rolled her eyes about like boiled eggs on a platter every time I stirred my chair, and jumped a foot off the floor whenever Dan addressed an order to her.

"Send Sam in to wait on table, you silly creature," I ordered sharply enough, when I could stand her no longer.

"I scare'," she blubbered, her apron to her eyes. "I 'spec' I daid already. Who gwine kill we-all, suh, en whut dey gwine do um for?"

Dan half rose from his seat, and she fled from the room.

"Eveh see sich fool?" demanded Sam, coming in. "I reckon dey must be 'flicted wid de moonness, Marse Billy." And with a sidelong glance at me, he added slyly: "I 'spec' *we*-all been 'flicted wid it, too, ter come ter sich place es dis."

"Do you want us to go home now, and leave these women here with only one man to protect them?" I demanded.

"No, suh, I don't want no sich thing," grumbled Sam. "Ef I got ter daid, I got ter daid, dat's all. Can't git erway from Gawd nohow, whah-eveh you is. Ef He want you, all He got ter do is ter reach down en ketch you by de scruff er de slack—en dar you is! I ain't much mind whah I got ter daid; I is mind whah I got ter live, en dis hyuh place don't look so ambitious ter er colored man like me, no-how!"

'Melia, madame's maid, came downstairs and stood in the dining-room door. Denuded of past haughtiness, of all desire to cuff, her manner toward Sam was conciliatory, placating, such a manner, indeed, as one assumes toward one's superiors. He, scenting it, sniffed loftily.

"I got a message from de madame

for yo' Mas' William, Mistah Sam," she simpered.

"Tain't nobody axin' you ter keep it, is dey?" inquired Sam sarcastically, unforgetful of his boxed ears.

"My madame say, kin yo' Mas' William come upstairs aftah breakfas'. Dat gal he, ketch in de woods wants see him. She say he best bring Mas' Dan 'long wid him, too."

Olga, at the head of the stairs, met us with an excited, brilliant face, her eyes wide and bright as a child's.

"Monsieur Dan!" she cried abruptly. "Monsieur Dan, is it that you do not guess whom you brought home to us last night?"

I think we suspected then, for as we looked at each other, Dan's ruddy face went white to the lips.

"Mother gave to her a sleeping potion, and she slept till but an hour since. I have told her she is with us who are friends, and she has told to me her name. Now she will see you both." She began to cry, the large tears running down her round cheeks. "Of such a sweetness, and with so much beauty!" she said. "Already I feel my heart go out toward her as a sister's."

She led us into her small white bedroom next to madame's—a young girl's room, exhaling purity and peace. Over the low white bed hung a Byzantine painting of the Madonna and Child, very quaint and foreign, and a beautifully carved crucifix. On a small table, next to a prayer book, a Bible, and a bowl of roses, were two tall silver candlesticks holding wax tapers. A light, rose-scented breeze swept in through the Swiss-draped, barred windows, stirring the long black hair of the girl lying on Olga's pillows. The blood and dirt washed from her pale face, she turned her large blue eyes toward us, and we recognized Angela Pecici.

Dan gave a cry, as if a bullet had pierced his lungs, and heedless of us,

dropped beside the bed, hiding his face in the white drapery.

"Angela! Angela! *You!*" he gasped. A painful, burning blush scorched the pallor of her face.

"For a second time you have saved me," she whispered, putting out her hand timidly.

I saw Dan reach forward and take the small bruised hand, saw his tears upon it as he carried it to his lips.

"We will wait a while," said madame, beckoning us out of the little room and closing the door.

Dan called us in after a while, and I leaned over the young girl and kissed her hand, too, and told her in a shaking voice how happy I was—how happy we all were—to have been of service to her.

Her story was absurdly simple. She had kept indoors, as Dan had suggested upon his visit to the convent, going out only in the afternoons and then accompanied by one of the Sisters; and she had communicated with her grandfather only by mail. But as the days had passed and nothing had happened, and as the old man had received no further threats or demands, her fears had been in a measure allayed.

But in his letters the old man had complained that he was not well, and this had worried her. So, when a cab had driven up to the convent one evening shortly after dark, and she had been given a note apparently signed by her grandfather, stating that he was ill and needed her, she had been quite ready to believe it. Thrusting the note into the hand of one of the Sisters, she had run bareheaded down the steps and jumped into the waiting cab, which had immediately driven off. As they had turned a corner, a man had seemed to arise from the cushions, a cloth had been thrust violently into her face, and she had known no more until she had awakened upon a sailboat, bound she knew not whither.

All that night, and until the next noon, they had journeyed, when the boat had come to a desolate spot in the marsh and there anchored. At the camp established there, she thought there must be some ten or twelve men, and they had spoken of others in the city. They were a regularly organized gang, she said. They had told her brutally they meant to get to the bottom of old Pecici's savings before they let her go—and if he failed, they threatened her with—horrible things. Later in the evening, she had been taken across the marsh and thrust into the Sand House, left to the keeping of Guido and one named Cuili.

And they had mocked her when she called upon God for aid—and Cuili, sitting cynically indifferent, had laughed. But God had sent His aid, and now Guido was dead. And she, although told to forgive her enemies, could not find it in her heart to forgive Cuili, or to pray for the wicked soul of Guido, cut off in his sins.

Dan questioned her closely as to the number of men in the camp; there were at least ten, of that she was certain—possibly twelve. Not all of them were now at the camp, however, most of them having returned to the city, the captain among them, possibly to extort ransom from her grandfather. For they had left her, as they supposed, in an undiscoverable hiding place.

That evening, dressed in some of Olga's clothes, Angela came into madame's sitting room. Warmed, sure of present shelter and safety, the blood had come back to her pale face, the light to her blue eyes. As Olga stood beside her, madame smilingly called our attention to the resemblance the girls bore each other. Both were blue-eyed, black-haired, red-lipped. But the Tuscan was of a richer, darker beauty; she was not so pearl white, she had less of that childlike grace and fire that exalted Olga.

The poor girl was in an agony of sorrow and apprehension both because of her grandfather's plight and because she had brought her troubles home to us.

"We're all right," I lied cheerfully. "If they attack together, we have the advantage of position and shelter, and if they come singly, we'll thin them out one at a time."

"Some of them, if not all, are likely to be back in a day or so," said Angela dejectedly. "Could we not use the launch and get to the city? Or, at least, can we get word there, somehow?"

"I must abide my fate here, whatever it be," said madame, with pale determination.

"And we will, of course, remain, too," said I.

But Dan jumped to his feet with an exultant cry.

"Idiot that I am to forget!" he cried. "Why, outside of wireless, I've got the surest and swiftest messenger on earth. Swiftwing!"

Running across the hall, he was back in an instant with the beautiful bird in his hand. Swiftwing, waked from a comfortable nap, clucked, and when put gently upon madame's small sewing table, ruffled his feathers and blinked his round eyes.

"Here's the boy for the work!" said his owner confidently. "He's going home to January with a message for Roberts."

He busied himself with pen and ink, and spread out for our inspection an incredibly small message:

ROBERTS: Tell Pecici Angela safe with us. Expect attack Black Hand. Help, quick. Ross-Ravenant, Lost Island.

"January will find him in the morning," said Dan. "And January'll get the message to Roberts, and Roberts will get help to us as quickly as he can. Say, in three days, at the latest."

He thrust Swiftwing, intrusted with

his precious message, through the barred window, where we crowded to watch him. The bird circled around for a second, got his bearings, and then, with an arrowy speed that justified his name, shot forward for home and help, we straining our eyes after him until he vanished in the void.

Hand in hand, the girls stole from the room, and through the open door I caught a wavering flicker of candle-light. It burned before the icon of the Virgin over Olga's bed.

"Comforter of the oppressed——" said the clear voice of Angela.

And the deeper, bell-like tones of Olga answered: "*Pray for us!*"

#### CHAPTER VIII.

On the afternoon of the next day, I went across the island to the Sand House. In the flickering sunshine, the place looked peaceful enough, with goldenrod creeping up to the creek's edge; the broken door lay against the sand walls, partly blocking the entrance, and the afternoon light streamed into the empty rooms, where the wind, whirling the sand about, had already effaced all signs of last night's struggle. There might still be, I thought, a darker, damper spot, where Guido's head had lain; but the hurrying, dark waters of the creek, swollen by the long rains, moved toward the marshes, giving no sign of what lay in the ooze and mud beneath.

I lay in the bushes and looked about me. To the left of the place several myrtles, dark green and odorous, grew in a circle. William Ravenant's "ring!" I wondered what would be Guido's thoughts could he crawl out of the waters covering him and know what had been in reach of his murderous hand!

I was still idly wondering when a far-off sound struck my ear—the steady dip of oars. With a speed that did me

credit, I got away, mounted at Neptune's, and raced for the Red House.

"We will not have them here to-night," said Smelkoff, and Dan agreed with him. "They must reconnoiter, and never could they find this place in the darkness. But they will spy us out in a day or two. We are, after all, but seven miles away from Little Landing, so we must be prepared."

"I shall send the other pigeon home to-night," said Dan.

He did not like to say that something might have stopped Swiftwing—that hawk or bullet might have imperiled the message we had sent.

"At any rate, by this time they've been to the Sand House, and they'll try to pick up our trail," I said. "We'll take turns at watching, and we mustn't be caught napping. You're tired, Smelkoff. You go on off to bed to-night. I'll stand watch, and Dan can relieve me at dawn."

All lights were out in the upper part of the house, and the servants slept in the rooms behind the library, inside the barred doors. In the long downstairs hall, a dim lamp burned, too feeble to penetrate through the stout doors. I sat on the stairs, and Smelkoff, who seemed disinclined to leave me, stayed for a while beside me.

"What is it?" I asked him presently.

"She is very, very feeble to-day," he whispered. "Never have I seen her like this before. I have doubled her potion, but it has not relieved her as heretofore, and her lips are marked with blue. Now she is in a half stupor, lying alone; for she made Mademoiselle Olga stay with the Italian lady lest they should guess her pain."

Oppressed by a new anxiety, I sat silent. I could not but recognize now how just had been Smelkoff's dread of bringing fresh anxieties upon her, unavoidable as the present situation was.

"I doubled that potion, for that I wished not to have her know we are



alarmed," Smelkoff went on. "Let her be in peace while she may. But this I must say, Monsieur Will—the end may come to her at any minute—and she herself feels it approach her."

He went away to his room with stooping shoulders, upon which rested the burden of another's griefs, while I remained on the steps with my head on my hands, pondering. And whichever way I looked, the prospect was unpleasant, in view of madame.

"Monsieur Will," said a fairy whisper above me. Hair in girlish braids, slim feet thrust into slippers, shapeless dressing gown covering her slight perfection, Olga, finger on lip, stole down and dropped lightly on the step above me.

"They are asleep, mother and Angela," she whispered. "Monsieur Dan stirs not, either, for I listened for a moment at his door. And I would be remembering how you are here in the dark, alone, so that I could not make myself sleep. Therefore I am here to beg you will allow me to stay with you a little while—Will." She dropped the "monsieur" lingeringly, naughtily.

Repressing the wild longing to have her with me, I told her sternly to go back to bed, that she must obey orders.

"But it is that I wish to remain with you," she protested, thrusting out her rosy lip. "I am awake; I may not sleep; therefore, I shall stay."

"Be a good child, dear, and go back to bed."

"Don't you wish that I should stay?"

"Yes, but——"

"Dan would allow that Angela should remain."

"Dan wouldn't."

"Not even if she pleaded much, as I do now?" she asked naively.

"No. Besides, I don't believe Angela would plead, when she knew she shouldn't," I said rashly.

Gathering her shapeless gown about her, Olga rose instantly.

"Good night, Monsieur Ravenant," she said icily. "It was very, very wrong and foolish for me to care whether you were of a lonesomeness. Indeed, I do not any more care one littlest bit whether you are or not, and I am very, very glad you would not allow that I should stay. I do not think it polite of you to show me so plainly that you are not wishful for me. You are of a great disagreeableness! Good night, monsieur."

I caught her by the sleeve and drew her back.

"Olga, dearest Olga, you mustn't leave me like this! You don't understand, dear. You just don't understand!"

"What do I not understand?" she asked, tartly enough.

"It was dear of you to want to come, and heavenly of you to do so," I hurried on, "but—but you really shouldn't, you know. And you're safer upstairs."

"But I am safe while I am with you anywhere, is it not?" she asked.

"I hope so. But that is not what I mean, Olga."

"But if I were here alone, in this so dark and dismal hall—and perhaps also in danger—would you like that I should wish you to remain upstairs asleep?" she asked indignantly.

"No, I wouldn't," I confessed helplessly. "But this is different, dear child."

"I will not have you 'dear child' me!" exclaimed Olga. Then, looking at me guilefully: "Are you in danger, right now, dear Will?"

"No more than the rest of us are—if we are at all," I reassured her.

"There is not, then, danger here?"

"No, dear Olga."

"Why, then, should you be untruthful, and say that I am safer upstairs?" she shot back, and sat down on the steps again.

I felt my lips twitch. And I did so

want her to stay, after all! And she leaned forward, like a coaxing child, an adorable child with eyes of light and lips of love.

"You are a dear, delightful, outrageous little witch," I told her. "And you're here to stay—for half an hour."

"But I so intended, all along," she conceded, patting me with her hand, which I retained.

"Would you care much—if I were really endangered?" I wondered.

"Would Angela—if Dan were, should you think?" she wondered again.

"Oh, hang Angela!" I said ungratefully, ungallantly.

Olga dimpled, but grew grave again. "I would care, oh, terribly, dreadfully much!" she said truthfully. "You are so nice a boy!" she sighed. "Always I wished for a brother, and——"

"What!" I turned upon her, raging. "You will not wish for that, too?" she reproached me.

"No, I don't, and I won't!" I retorted angrily. "But if that execrable fate is to be mine, I'll live up to it. Sister, your half hour's up. Go to bed, like a good child. You need rest."

Olga looked up thoughtfully, a deep, deep dimple dancing in her cheek. With enraging deference, she murmured:

"It is a great happiness to obey you."

"You outrageous little wretch!" I said indignantly.

"But truly it is of a pleasantness for me to obey you—dear Will," said Olga, beginning to mount the stairs.

"Why?" I wondered.

"I—don't know," confessed Olga, pausing. "Perhaps—because."

"Olga, wait a minute—just one minute more."

"But I need rest, is it not?" she demurred. "You have ordered me away, no?"

"But not because I don't want you to stay," I blurted.

"You really, really, really wish me to remain?"

"Olga, Olga!"

"Ah, you do, you do!" she laughed under her breath. "Very, very much?"

"A million times much."

She turned slowly and sat down again.

"That minute is 'most passed, monsieur," she reminded me, as I did not speak.

I could only say thickly: "Olga!"

She started and, turning toward me, said in a trembling voice:

"Me, I must go."

"You mustn't—yet," I said.

The next second I had kissed her, meeting but a child's mouth, startled and unresponsive. So for a long second we sat there, staring at each other in the faint light.

"It is—of a strangeness," she whispered, looking at me with wide eyes, "that I feel toward you—as I do. Oh, but a curious feeling! I thought, me, it was because you are the nephew of monsieur, but——" Her voice trailed away into silence.

"It is that you are you and I am I," I told her gently.

She did not reply, but sat staring before her, a child questioning the dark.

"I am very, very lonesome," I complained presently, taking her small fingers.

She did not withdraw them, but let them curl, velvet soft, in my palm.

Oh, William Ravenant, did you guess, did you know, when, in view of madame, you chose me, only me, to whom to bequeath the wonder and beauty and danger of Lost Island? "All that a man has of truth, of faith, and of honor," you wrote. It was true, it was true!

The little hand trembled in mine, tried gently, vainly to withdraw.

"Olga! Dear, dear Olga, won't you look at me?"

She did so, fearlessly, innocently; but a deep flush, the badge of new, sweet knowledge, crept into her cheek. After that long look, she turned her face aside, trembling. I put out my hand and very softly turned the flower face to mine again.

"Olga—why, I believe you are trembling! Surely, surely you will not tremble—at me!"

"I—I think it is—your eyes," said Olga breathlessly. Her hand went to her heart. "They—they are—new eyes, dear Will. They say——"

"They say, 'I love you, Olga,'" I breathed against her ear.

She sat stone silent, rigidly erect. And a horrid and sickening fear swept over me. For she was, after all, but a child, and perhaps I had been too hasty. Perhaps she did not care—like that. Perhaps I had, misled by my own absorbing passion, mistaken the pretty playfulness of an innocent child for something deeper, diviner. I could feel myself turning white with anguish.

"Olga——" My voice broke.

"Oh, is it *that*?" The golden voice held a new thrill. "And to think that so short a while ago I should have been living here, not dreaming that you were coming, big and beautiful and wonderful, coming to me, out of that great world I know so little of!"

"You care? You *care*?"

"*Care*?" There was an almost scornful wonder in her voice.

I took both her hands and held them against my breast. We looked at each other long, face to face.

"Say, 'I love you,'" I demanded. "Say it, so I'll be sure. I won't believe unless I hear you say it."

She looked at me calmly, without a hint, a trace, of fear or embarrassment. The call of life had come to her, and she answered with a royal grace.

"But I *do* love you," she said.

And when I gathered her into my

arms and kissed her, a close, sweet union of arms and lips, a woman's mouth answered the caress. She had kissed me in return.

And so we, wandering in Eden, lost track of so common a thing as the flight of time. The wonder of life, the divinity of love, had come to us. We made no plans—we had not come to that. We knew only that the hour of loving was ours, and now. In that heavenly hour how should we remember madame sleeping upstairs with blue lips that bore marks of pain, or Smelkoff lying with a gun close to his hand?

"You'll have to go, darling," I said dolefully at last, coming out of a reverie.

Olga rose obediently. I watched the jealous upstairs door close behind the trailing dressing gown, and then sat down to fall into another dream. Heaven knows how long it lasted, but Dan, dressed and alert, was beside me before I was aware of his coming.

"Watchman, what of the night?" he quoted.

"What did you get up for?" I asked tartly.

"It is not beyond even my limited powers to observe that love is blind," said Dan serenely. "This ranch needs a watchman who watches, William. I arose from dreams of thee, in the first sweet hush of night, when——"

"Shut up!" I said savagely.

"You've a ferocious temper, Bill," said Dan, grinning.

"Monsieur Dan!" called a low and exquisite voice from the head of the stairs.

We looked up, and in the ghostly light saw Olga bending over the banisters.

"Monsieur Dan, when it is your turn to watch, shall I ask that Angela sit with you for a space?" she whispered, and vanished, leaving Dan staring after her sheepishly enough.

## CHAPTER IX.

We had to find out what was taking place at Little Landing; we couldn't sit still and wait for an attack. So, after a few hours of sleep, I again went out into the morning, alive with a thousand voices of birds, sweet with resinous wood scents. No one was at the Sand House, but over the edge of the marsh, flashing whitely in the sun, glimmered a sail. Our enemies had evidently waited for reinforcements, and now that the sailboat had returned, I thought we could reckon upon a visit in force, and at an early date.

I rode on slowly from Neptune's, the fresh air, full of sharp sea tang, refreshing me. Our small launch lay anchored near the river landing, and I turned my horse's head toward the wharf for a morning inspection. Far down the river a sound arose—and I drew rein sharply, leaning, listening, over the horse's head. The sound came nearer—the regular, fussy chuck-chuck-chuck of a motor boat.

"Swiftwing reached Roberts, and he's come!" I thought exultantly, as I slipped from the horse and ran down upon the wharf, waving my cap. The relief, so soon, so unexpectedly, blessedly soon, made me wild with delight. For were we never so brave and determined, the odds had been against us if those desperadoes on the marsh hummock had attacked us in force. We were but four men, including Sam, and we had three women to protect.

Although the Red House was invisible from the river, hidden as it was by the trees, from the upstairs windows of the house one could catch glimpses of the river, thus viewing any boat approaching the wharf. They would, therefore, have seen this one, and share in the delirium of relief I felt.

Around the bend of the river swung the launch, gallantly flying the good old

Stars and Stripes, which fluttered gayly in the breeze. There were several men aboard, among whom I thought I recognized the lean brown lawyer himself. I gave a joyous shout, waving my cap above my head.

The boat swung in, turned, and backed water as her engineer drove her toward the landing place. A man, his head bent so that I could not see his face, clambered through the window, dragging after him the noosed rope with which to tie up to the wharf. Hands outstretched, I bent forward to help him.

"Now!" shouted a voice.

The fellow crouched, made a flying leap for the wharf, and in a moment was upon me.

So sudden, so utterly unexpected, had been his movements, that, stunned as I was with surprise, for a moment he gained the mastery; I made no outcry. But I think that he had the fight of his life in the next few minutes. Struggling, we swung to and fro, perilously close to the wharf edge, I in a frantic effort to break his grip, to shout at least one warning that haply some one at the Red House might hear and heed, he as furiously endeavoring to hold me. Between his locked teeth his breath came in whistling gusts as I, swinging my arms, beat upon his face, tore at his throat, and, writhing and twisting, struck and kicked. I gained the wharf's edge and lunged backward, forcing him after me. Together we toppled over and fell, with a mighty splash, into the water.

As the river closed over us, he released me, and I came to the surface. Pretty thoroughly choked, the blood was roaring in my ears, the world above water shook and wavered before my eyes. Above my head loomed the side of the naphtha, and even as I struck for shore, strong arms clutched me and I was dragged aboard. As I sank, gasping, upon the bit of deck, I saw

them haul aboard my assailant—a red-bearded fellow with a scar from brow to chin.

It was but a moment's work to bind me hand and foot, and I enjoyed the sensation of being trussed like a roasting chicken, while beside my dripping antagonist, who stood above me, appeared the corpse-like countenance of the other man I had seen with him at Pecici's.

I think I must have gone mad for a minute or two, remembering Smelkoff and those two women at the Red House. Impotently fighting against the bonds that held me, I was lifted and thrust into a small, closely curtained cabin, there to lie on my helpless back and rage against the carelessness, the stupidity that had made me so easy a prey. I had been caught between the hammer and the anvil, and I wondered, in bitterness of spirit, if it would not have been far better to have dealt with the Italians than with these men, from whom madame fled, God knew why.

I strained my ears for a sound from shore, but only the water lapping against the boat's sides came to me. What—great God!—was happening up there at the Red House? What was befalling Olga and her mother, and I not by to help?

Running feet, guttural exclamations, broke upon a long and nerve-racking silence. Men, scrambling into the cabin, jerked aside the curtains and let the clean sunlight flood it. They rapidly loosened the cords from my feet, but my hands were still tied behind me; I suppose they did not wish me to present so alarming a spectacle to the veiled woman they were leading into the launch. The two chiefs walked beside her—a veiled figure in a blue dress; and with sickening clearness, I saw upon her slim hand Olga's birthday ring.

"Olga!" I groaned. "Olga!"

"Yes, Monsieur Ravenant," she re-

plied, her voice, muffled in her veil, strained to the breaking point.

I thought I should never have recognized, in that trembling murmur, the golden tones of Olga.

"Your hi—mademoiselle will please be seated," said he of the scarred face deferentially. "I beseech your gracious ladyship to lay aside all fear that any harm is intended you. Indeed, my life would answer for it. Nothing but your own greatest good is sought by us."

She seated herself composedly enough. Gathering a splendid courage, she faced her fate without a tremor. A thrill of pride arose in my sick heart.

"Is there any further necessity for detaining Monsieur Ravenant?" she inquired, with an imperiousness that seemed to impress them profoundly. "So to treat my friends is but a poor way of putting me at my ease!"

"We will release him immediately upon his promise to leave this boat without further struggle or effort to detain you," said the corpse-faced fellow, bowing to us both.

"He will agree, when I so ask him," said the girl quietly.

She pushed back, as she spoke, her shrouding veil, and I found myself staring into the lovely pale face and the brave blue eyes of Angela.

"Monsieur Ravenant," she addressed me quietly, in her flawless French, "I am assured that no harm will come to me, and I have voluntarily intrusted myself to these—messengers—for such they are—from my—my uncle. And for this they have agreed to—leave my—my mother"—her voice trembled slightly—"Stefan, her servant, and yourself, here, unmolested. You will, therefore, monsieur, make no effort to detain me, but go immediately home and endeavor to console my mother for my absence."

The profound admiration, the won-



dering joy, that I could not conceal glowed in my face, my eyes, and brought a delicate flush to her cheek.

Scarface, at her order, slashed my bonds and helped me to my feet respectfully enough.

"The fortunes of war, believe me, monsieur," he purred amicably. "And now freedom is before you." He waved shoreward.

I took Angela's small hand and raised it reverently to my lips.

"God be with you, mademoiselle," I choked. "And we shall at least hear from you, shall we not?"

"Such is my intention," she said quietly.

I bowed without speaking and scrambled out of the boat, which, with much thrashing of water, backed off and turned her nose upstream, speeding cityward, with our own launch in tow behind her.

As she rounded the bend in the river, a blue-clad figure leaned from her cabin window and waved a dark veil in fluttering farewell.

I stood on the wharf until she had vanished, and our launch with her. We were doomed to face our fate on Lost Island in good earnest now, if Swift-wing had failed to find Roberts.

"We will return your launch later," Scarface had informed me politely, with an evil smile.

He wasn't going to run any risk of pursuit and interference.

Sick with rage and shame, I turned at last toward the Red House, my horse quietly trotting at my heels. He had been calmly gorging himself with marsh grasses during my imprisonment, and now nickered at me as pleasantly as if no calamity had happened.

Smelkoff, with his head on his hands, was sitting dejectedly on the front steps as I came up. They, too, had been taken by surprise, he said. Madame had, indeed, caught a glimpse of the boat coming down the river, and they

had all thought, as I had, that Roberts had come with the help asked for. Overjoyed, Smelkoff had begun to prepare breakfast for the newcomers.

A little later, coming out of the dining room, he had faced the shock and horror of those two faces upon him. Utterly at a disadvantage, he had had time but to scream one warning up to madame. Hearing her door slammed and bolted, helpless, tied as I had been, he had sat down quietly to meet his fate. The end had come, he had thought.

Dan, roused out of his sleep, had managed to splinter one fellow's arm before he had been overpowered, and Sam and Neptune, unarmed, unable to cope with the superior force, had sullenly submitted. The Red House had fallen into the hands of the enemy almost without a struggle, so overwhelming had been the surprise of their advent.

Upstairs, madame in a few words had explained Olga's danger to the two girls, and the Italian, so lately taken out of the hands of unscrupulous men, had shuddered and turned pale. And then, in the inspiration of desperation, her quick brain had conceived one of those daring plans that succeed because of their very simplicity. Seeing a way to help these new friends who had saved and sheltered her, she had proceeded to act upon it.

"They have not seen her since she was a young child, is it not?" she had inquired.

"She was barely three when we fled," madame had answered dully, sunk in her chair.

"Has she any mark—any jewel, even—to identify her?" the Italian had persisted.

Madame had pointed to Olga's hand.

"The ring," she had said.

"Give it me," Angela had said hurriedly and, forcing it from Olga, had slipped it upon her own finger.

A brooch bearing the same heraldic device had been hastily taken from madame's neck and pinned at her own.

"They will not suspect," she had whispered to madame, who had begun to protest. "It is your one chance, dear lady. Only obey me, and I am sure I shall be able to do what I wish—to save her until help comes."

"It is not fair, this," Olga had protested hotly. "You wish to endanger yourself to shield me?"

"You were endangered because of me," the Italian had replied impatiently. "Olga, they want not me—it is *you* they come for. When they find out, I shall be released, but by then you will have escaped them. Into the closet with you—so!"

Thrusting Olga into the wardrobe closet next the fireplace—an old-fashioned recess, very wide and deep—Angela had screened her completely behind the rows of hanging dresses.

The whole thing had occupied but a few seconds; then, clinging to madame, Angela had knelt beside the lady's chair.

A heavy hand had rapped upon the door; a peremptory voice had called: "*Open!*" And as one in great terror, Angela had cried out.

Slowly, with tottering steps, white as the dead, madame had gone forward and opened her door to her enemies. Behind her, in the center of the room, had crouched black-haired, blue-eyed, beautiful Angela. At sight of that slim kneeling figure, the eyes of the men in the doorway had flamed; beyond all doubt, this was she whom they sought! They had never for a moment doubted her identity, for she answered too perfectly the description of what Olga should have grown to be.

Not daring to lay rude hands upon her, they had yet told her respectfully, but firmly, that she must come with them.

"Why?" Angela had blazed, rising

and playing her part with superb courage.

The men had turned toward madame, standing rigidly erect beside a chair, her eyes turned from the faces that had been, for so many years, her nightmare and that were now in dreadful reality before her. As she had said nothing, they had turned toward the girl.

"Mademoiselle," the scar-faced Volowski had informed her, "your father's brother, the Prince Sergius Velmaroff—whose lieutenants we are—commands that you shall, under his guardianship, assume your proper place in the country of your birth. We are therefore sent to bring you to him. His highness will meet you in person in a few days, and he himself will escort you to Russia. By the czar's command!" he had added sharply.

Angela had looked from one to the other coolly, speculatively. Old Pecici had once been a deep-sea captain of his own ship, before evil days had overtaken him. His granddaughter inherited some of the old seaman's spirit and daring. After a long and thoughtful pause, she had given her ultimatum:

"I will go, of my own free will, as it were," she had said crisply, her eyes alight, her chin in the air. "For this you will leave here unmolested my mother and Stefan, her servant." And as for a moment they had hesitated, she had added sharply: "Otherwise, I shall go unwillingly, as a captive, and at the first opportunity I shall call upon the law—American law. Choose!"

They had conferred together, in low voices, in purring, backboneless Russian, while shrewd Angela had sat composedly enough, her hands in her lap, having given them a choice they must fain accept.

"There is also—a box," Volowski had said to madame meaningly.

Without answering, without hesitation, madame had gone into her bed-

room and returned with a small key and a pass book.

"Monsieur Ravenant thought better to place the box in a safe-deposit vault," she had said briefly.

"He was of a diabolic cleverness, that one," Volowski had said admiringly, as he had seized the key and the book eagerly. "Eh, but the prince will rejoice to have this—for mademoiselle's sake!" he had put in, with a sidelong glance at the supposed Olga.

Looking at the white-faced, broken woman, the fellow had smiled a little derisively. They had hunted her, tracked her; she had wandered by twisted trails; she had made a long and a losing fight, and at last the paw of the Bear had fallen upon her, as, sooner or later, they had known it must.

"You have given us a great deal of trouble, princess," they had told her. "Well, we have won. How could you ever doubt that we must? And the prince will rejoice to have at home his brother's daughter, and his ward, in his own keeping."

Smiling strangely, madame had met his eyes calmly.

"I am an old woman and I have now but a little longer to live," she had said calmly. "But it comes to me that I may not go down to the grave before I have seen divine vengeance overtake the evil and the unrighteous."

Shrugging unbelieving shoulders, they had smiled, sure of their prey, while madame, looking into the blue eyes of Angela, had gone over and laid her arms around the girl's shoulders.

"My child, my child!" she had said, and had fallen to weeping, so that Angela, with tears of pity, had gathered the frail body in her strong young arms, whispering her to be brave, that God is stronger than the designs of men.

Baerzev—such was the corpselike one's name—had looked almost scornfully at Angela's simple clothing.

"Take but a change of linen, made-

moiselle," he had counseled. "The prince will procure you an outfit upon your arrival in the city."

"And you will please to make haste. We must begone," Volowski had added.

So Angela, kissing madame farewell, had walked bravely downstairs, tying a veil over her beautiful hair as she went, meeting in the hall the amazed and anguished eyes of Smelkoff.

"Mademoiselle!" he had gasped. "Mademoiselle, you go with them?"

Angela's hand had fallen upon his shoulder.

"I go willingly, Stefan," she had said clearly. "For that they leave you and my mother here, untroubled. Console her for my departure. Shortly, I trust, you will hear from me.

"Mr. Ross," she had faltered, the hardest part of her ordeal being to face Dan, who had stared at her, his young face pale and tormented. "I go for the sake of—others. Surely you—you above all—understand?"

"I understand, mademoiselle," Dan had said with stiff lips.

Angela had looked at him, a long and beautiful look; then, with a bright blush, she had held out her hand and Dan had kissed it. Seeing his need, Angela had showed him her heart in that moment of trial.

"Good-by, good-by!" she had murmured. "Dear, dear Mr. Ross!"

Then, with her head proudly erect, she had walked out of the Red House in the wake of the frowning Russians, plainly bewildered and horrified by the graciousness bestowed upon a plain American man by a great Russian lady.

Angela, not daring to show her eagerness to be gone, for our sakes, had walked slowly, as one who mourns, turning her head to kiss her hand in farewell to the pale face of madame in the upstairs window. She had trembled, fearing that some unforeseen accident might betray her, until she had reached the boat.

But her wit and daring had won a respite for us. And I think, after her farewell to me, that it was almost in exultation that Angela waved her veil as the launch rounded the bend in the river and left Lost Island behind her.

The Italian had, it is true, averted for the time a great danger, for Olga was still with us, but we could not guess how long our safety would continue. That would depend upon Roberts' response to Swiftwing's message—if he had received it. His lieutenants had said that Sergius Velmaroff awaited his ward in the city, and the effect of this news upon madame had been disastrous. A more deathly whiteness had settled upon her face, and the ominous blue marks had appeared again around her lips. After Angela's departure, she had fallen into a chair beside the open window, and lay there staring fixedly out into the far blue sky. There I found her when I hastened upstairs after seeing Smelkoff.

Olga, running to me with a glad cry, was gathered into my arms; and as we clung to each other, too moved for speech, madame turned her head slowly and watched us. Presently a ghostly smile moved like palest moonlight over her still face.

"William hoped for this," she said in a weak whisper. "It was his plan, his cherished hope. Well, it is the best, the only solution. But you are both so young! How am I to be sure you love each other—enough?"

I could only answer with my eyes—Ravenant eyes. But there must have been something in that gaze that spoke to her of another William Ravenant's power of loving, for she signed me to approach.

"I am not afraid to give my darling into your keeping, William Ravenant," she said, and there were tears on her cheek. "Ah, promise me that whatever happens, whatever may seem to have power to divide you, will only

make you two hold fast to each other! Promise me that you will let nothing separate you! Olga, you will remember this, and—if the time comes when he thinks he must let you go, recall to him my counsel!"

"I will remember. It is not in me to forget or to change," said Olga simply.

Madame laid her thin fingers in mine for a moment, and then signed for us both to leave her, for a space, alone. Hand in hand we stole downstairs to comfort Dan.

## CHAPTER X.

I don't like to remember the three days that followed—long, interminable, dreadful days. Madame, failing of a sudden, sank into a deathly stupor, which kept Olga and Melia, the maid, in constant apprehensive attendance upon her, while we downstairs waited for the dark message that the end had come. Dan went about with a still, miserable face, more distressing to me than open lamentations would have been. Sam, sitting with his head bent upon his knees, prayed audibly, declaring that he had had a "calling;" and Smelkoff, moving like an automaton, passed swiftly and noiselessly about the house, in his spare moments polishing the swords he had taken down from above the dining-room mantel.

"They are thirsty," he said dryly, rubbing them until they glittered like his eyes. "It is long, long since they have drunk! I think they smell blood."

The nights passed, dragging by in slow minutes, endless hours. I had taken the night watches, allowing Dan and Smelkoff to sleep, while old Neptune dozed in a corner of the hall, and Sam sat on the steps muttering to himself. For the first time in a week, his face was calm and untroubled, his old grin had reappeared.

"Now I done got me sperret satefy, I

ain't got no mo' trouble," he whispered. "Marse Billy, chile, dis ole nigger done de best he could by you. He done de best he could, honey. You sure been er powerful comfort ter me—you en yo' pa befo'. I 'spec' I ain't scared ter meet yo' pa now."

"You've been a good and faithful friend and servant, my dear old Sam," I told him, squeezing his hard black hand.

"I 'spec' I is been," he agreed, wagging his head. "Now, Marse Billy, you ain't need me in hyuh. I gwine out in de barn en watch. I got er notion dem debbils gwine meddle wid dat barn, so I gwine stay wid de hosses. I hide all de cows in de canebrake dis afternoon. But I worryin' 'bout dem hosses."

"All right," I agreed.

It must have been three o'clock in the morning when the first warning came, in the sound of a shot from the barn, followed by a stampede of the horses, which Sam had rushed straight into the midst of a group of dark figures stealthily crouching in the shelter of the picket hedge. Firing again, Sam ran for the shelter of the house, shielded by the rearing horses, who rushed forward, broke through the hedge, and gained the open woods beyond.

"Dey sho' wasn't lookin' fer dem hosses," said Sam, grinning, as Smelkoff, who had tumbled downstairs at the first shot, barred the doors behind him. "Looks ter me like I got one er dem wid er bullet, Marse Billy."

The upstairs side windows commanded the yard hedges and a bit of the forest beyond, while the front windows gave upon the garden. Dan and I hastily decided to take the upstairs, Sam and Smelkoff remaining downstairs.

A complete silence ensued; then a glare, and a line of flame running up the barn. Sam had been correct in his

surmise—they were going to use the torch. Fortunately the wind was from us, and the Red House was far enough removed from the barn to obviate danger.

As the flames gathered headway, we made out our enemies, the captain conspicuous in red neckerchief and sash. Having spied us out, they had come in full force to collect payment for Guido, for, as well as we could make out, they were some fifteen strong.

As they stood arguing and gesticulating, Dan fired from his window, a moment after my own rifle had sent a shot toward them. One man spun around and fell. The captain himself leaped, yelling, as he clutched at his arm.

"I didn't practice for the Seagirt for nothing," called Dan. "And you winged yours, Billy."

A moment later the gang separated. Some, retreating to the shadow of the hedges, remained in the side yard; others moved to the front garden; the rest toward the rear of the house. Evidently considering us, in that remote spot, cut off from help, they had decided to depart from their usual guerrilla tactics and attack us openly.

No light appeared in madame's rooms, where, in the darkness, Olga and the frightened negro girl knelt beside the bedside of the unconscious woman. The other servants, huddled in the upstairs hall, prayed in staccato whispers, mingling praise and promise with supplications. From downstairs came the quick firing of Sam and Smelkoff, ensconced behind the dining-room windows. Neptune, on the hall stairs, calmly awaiting orders, kept a steady hand upon his ax and smoked his corn-cob unmoved. The whole house was full of the acrid odor of smoke.

They had evidently singled out a firing center, for a steady hail of bullets rattled upon the side windows of the house. Mine finally growing too warm



for me, I ducked and ran along the shelter of the wall toward the front windows giving upon the garden. As I gained the first, a bullet caught me in the shoulder, putting my left arm to the bad. I could feel the fiery sting of it, followed by a hot trickling of blood down my shirt sleeve. In return, I fired at a skulking shape running toward the shelter of the honeysuckle arbor. A scream answered, the choking scream of one plugged through the lungs.

The garden was lit now by the glare of the burning barn, and in a reddish pool of light lay the man I had shot—a large, powerfully built fellow in a blue shirt, a spotted handkerchief tied about his throat. His hat, fallen off, left his thick, curling black hair uncovered. Before he fell, he had spun around, grimacing, clawing at his breast. Then, collapsing inertly, he had sunk downward heavily, twitching throughout his whole length. He lay still now, one hand doubled under him, the other outstretched.

Dan ran up to me, blood streaming from a wound in the cheek.

"Nothing to cry over," he laughed gayly. "A furrow plowed across the skin line."

As he spoke, he hastily bound a towel about his head. My own shoulder was on fire; my arm hung limp, the coat caked to the arm.

"Hit?" ejaculated Dan, turning pale. "Good Lord, Billy! Can you hold out?" he added anxiously.

"Oh, sure," I said steadily enough, although the floor threatened to rise and hit me in the face.

I have a rather confused idea of events after that. The fire from the barn had sunk, but from it still rose dark-red bursts of flame and rolling wreaths of smoke; and in this lurid light, the masses of shrubbery, the moss-hung trees, the airy rose vines, stood out with an almost theatrical

splendor. It was as if one witnessed a spectacular effect, fairylike and unreal.

We ran from side to side of the house, following the shots. Failing to effect an entrance, and afraid to rush us in the face of a steady and galling fire, our visitors finally concentrated their force in the front garden, where the shrubs and arbors gave greater concealment. Sam had shot one fellow who had approached the Red House with a torch, and he lay outstretched upon his face, the still burning embers within reach of his hand.

From the garden, the firing grew fiercer; around the barred windows behind which we crouched, a fusillade rattled, spat, and whined. I kept one thought clear in my mind—I must stand and fire as long as I could hold that gun in my hand. I was staggering then—but across the hall was Olga!

The dawn was growing, the gray, ghostly light was giving place to deep pure gold, when, above the rattle of musketry, there came from the river a shrill and piercing boat whistle, and the sound of bells clanging dully. I peered through the bars of the window, straining my eyes through the trees, and I caught a glimpse of a boat, white as a hound's tooth, flashing by. Golden eagle upon her prow, red-white-and-blue flag flying, a revenue cutter was racing for the wharf. Even as I looked, a flash and puff came from her deck, and a shot crashed through the palmetto trees.

Shouting madly, exultantly, Dan leaped for the stairs, I, holding on to the banisters, stumbling dizzily after him. Outside, the rifle fire had abruptly ceased, and in the sudden silence we could hear the captain screaming for his followers to run for Little Landing. It took him some precious seconds to make them understand, to gather them together. Before he could drive them before him down the palmetto avenue,

the cutter had landed a detail; the men were already racing forward, yelling as they came.

Dan, flinging open the front door, leaped like a greyhound in pursuit of the flying rascals, and, joined by the foremost cutter men, was close upon them. The morning rang again with yells, shots, shouts, groans; over the palmetto trees hung a heavy pall of smoke.

I had come out upon the piazza, where I stood blinking in the growing golden light. The air was tinged with the sharp smell of powder, and in the trampled garden in front of me lay the man I had shot, very limp and still. Almost beside him lay another figure, also blue-shirted and bareheaded.

Two of them? I stood blinking owlishly, foolishly, for the piazza under my feet was undulating like the sea, moving sickeningly, and I had to sway to keep erect at all. But still it seemed to me that one of those prone figures had moved, slowly lifting itself upon an elbow. Now a fierce and furious face was lifted menacingly; a hand stole forward, holding something bright and glittering. Still rocking with the motion of the piazza, I watched it impersonally.

A shout—a hoarse cry of warning—rang in my ears. Dimly, dreamily I felt, rather than saw, old Sam leap from the hall door, flinging himself bodily before me. Followed a roar, and he flung up his arms. We fell together, I into a soft and velvety darkness, infinitely soothing and grateful after the living fire burning in my shoulder. But Sam carried in his breast the bullet meant for mine.

Wrapped in peaceful and entire unconsciousness, I lay for hours, while the day burned itself out in splendor of sun and sea. I awoke to recognition of a kindly and sallow face bent over me, stared out of a red mist, and found, after long pondering, that the

face belonged to Roberts, and that he was shakily asking me how I felt. I didn't feel at all, and so mumbled.

Other faces came presently—Dan's, with a neat bandage turbaning his fair, thick hair; Smelkoff's, smiling palely; Olga's, full of love and grief, but beautiful and tender beyond words. I looked about mistily for another—a black one, a face I had been used to since my babyhood; helpless, I wished for those helpful black hands that had served me lovingly all my life. I wanted Sam, and I managed to whisper it to Dan. I should see him after a while, Dan said, with averted face.

"Oh, you're all right!"

A man in a white duck suit, with a clever bearded face and quizzical eyes, bent over me; the cutter's surgeon, he said.

I said I supposed so, and drifted off to sleep. It was late evening when I woke again, with a clearer head, my aching arm dressed and bandaged, and free of pain.

"Feel almost well, don't you?" asked Whitcomb, the surgeon. "Tough as a lightwood knot, you fellows down in this part of the world."

Most of the Italians had been captured, Dan told me later, but the captain and one or two of the gang had managed to make the marsh and so escape, for the time being. The cutter had gone in hot pursuit, and there wasn't a chance for the kidnapers long to elude capture.

The delay that had nearly cost us so dear had not been due to Swiftwing or his mate. They had reached home like living telegrams. But Roberts had been out of town, and January, though refusing to give the message into any other hands than Roberts, had yet had wit enough to wire an urgent for him. The message calling him to Lost Island had brought Roberts flying back to town as soon as he could turn his client's case into able hands. Then he had

promptly called upon the authorities, already moving heaven and earth to find Angela Pecici's abductors. The revenue cutter, pressed into service, had come at top speed, Roberts tramping up and down deck all night, afraid lest he should, after all, be too late. As it was, they had come in the thick of the row, fortunately for us.

Madame was still unconscious, Dan went on soberly. Olga had divided her time between us—but madame was in bad shape, Dan added.

The door of my room opened cautiously, and a bald head, surmounted by tufts of snowy wool, poked itself inside. After a lengthy survey, January shuffled toward us.

"Neveh see de beat er dat boy!" he grumbled. "Jest es soon es I tu'n him loose, he natchelly tumble, kerplunk, into trebble. Wisht ter Gawd dey was some way er mekin' him stay home, 'staid er traipsin' round de kentry wid mo' fool boys!" He cocked a weary old eye at me severely. "I say, *mo' fool boys*, gittin' deyse'fs kilt daid en tarrygatin' de life outer peoples."

Hovering about the exasperated Dan, he stung him like a complaining wasp with whines and reproaches.

"What the devil did they let him come here for?" I burst forth in helpless irritation.

"How could they help it, when he hung onto Roberts' coat tails, bawling and threatening to call the police unless they brought him along?" demanded Dan, with a twinkle in his eye.

"You lemme look at dat bandage ergin. I got ter wet it like de doctor say," ordered January. "Some day I gwine lef' you ter yo'se'f, en den whut in de name er Gawd you gwine do, I natchelly wonder." He turned from Dan to me. "I sho' Gawd gwine tell yo' Aunt Trescott you been gittin' yo'se'f shot up, quor'lin' wid dem no-'count furriners," he threatened.

Dan rose inexorably, took him by

the shoulders, ran him, protesting and hanging back, across the room, and forced him outside, locking the door after him.

"Some day I'll have to nail up your mouth, January," he said gently, as a bitter, prolonged whine came through the keyhole.

"You're a strange people," said the surgeon, as he came in a few minutes later. "I'm getting side lights on the color scheme. Mr. Ravenant, I'll really have to run the risk of allowing you to crawl downstairs to your fellow Sam. He's in a bad way, poor old chap, and he's crying to see you. He thinks you're dying, and we won't tell him."

Between Dan and the doctor, I got downstairs. Sam lay on a mattress in the library, his eyes fastened on the door. He tried to raise himself as he saw me enter, but fell back, gasping. The doctor, leaving me to Dan, ran forward and knelt beside him.

"Marse Billy!" gasped Sam, when he could speak. "Marse Billy! T'ank Gawd, chile, I kept dem debbils from gittin' you!"

I saw the truth at a glance, and sat down weakly on the floor beside him, taking his hand. I had held onto that hand when, a little shaver, I had been afraid to lie alone in the dark. Now I sat and held it while he himself began his journey into the Greater Dark, and I began to weep as, long ago, the little boy that had been I had wept while old Sam comforted him. Dan's eyes were wet, and the surgeon regarded us all with a kindly, but curious regard.

"Lawd, chile, whut's de use er frettin'?" asked Sam mildly. "I got plenty er friends yander I'se pinin' ter see," he went on feebly. "I got Marse William, en yo' pa. Bimeby you'll be comin' yo'se'f, en Marse Billy, honey, you jest 'member old Sam'll be waitin' fer you. Lawd, yes, he'll be sho' waitin'."

I knew he would, I said, through tears.

He dozed for a while, but the end was so near I sat by him. I couldn't leave him, the little while I was to have him. When he opened his eyes again, the time had come. Looking at me wistfully, but without a trace of fear, he asked mildly:

"You 'member de Shepherd Psalm yo' ma en yo' Aunt Trescott teach you, honey? Ain't you kin say dat psalm now?"

A gray shadow was stealing across his face. Slipping my arm under him, I raised him so that his old gray woolly head rested against me. Even as I spoke, his fingers grew cold in mine:

"Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

With those immortal words in his failing ears, with that unfading promise before his fading eyes, Sam went.

## CHAPTER XI.

In the early morning we laid old Sam to rest in the garden under the sweet rose oleanders. It seemed to me that when the earth closed over his gray wool, the last link binding me to an old past snapped and vanished. He had known my father in his youth, my mother in her beauty, he had been known and trusted by my uncle, and by his side I had grown up. Something at once humorous and tender vanished with him, never to be replaced. I am unashamed of the tears I shed. And I saw Dan meekly submit to January's insistence and allow himself to be carried off.

"You got ter lemme wash dat busted haid er yo's dis minnit," fussed January, with more of real emotion than I had ever seen him exhibit. "You gimme too much trebble, Marse Dan. S'posin' you done go daid, whut in Gawd's worl'

you 'spec' I gwine ter do?" And he began to snifle.

"Come upstairs and tie me up, Jan," said Dan mildly.

After a while, Roberts came out on the veranda and sat beside me. His eyes were red, for he, too, had known old Sam for many years.

"Nasty business, this," he grumbled. "And there's those damn' Russians, too—they'll come back, of course."

I was pretty sick and sore, and I dare say I swore—a relief to pent-up feeling.

"That's a great girl, that Angela Pecici," commented Roberts, coming out of a fit of abstraction, during which I had sulkily glowered at the garden, where that new grave hurt me like a wound. "A splendid girl!" went on Roberts, with relish. "If I hadn't a spouse already—or if our laws wisely allowed two—I'd go after that girl myself."

I looked up, and the lawyer put out an admonitory hand.

"Don't swear any more, Billy," he said. "Swearing's sinful. But it's strange, the solid comfort a man can get out of a few healthy damns, isn't it?"

"I wasn't going to swear," I remarked coldly. "I was only going to say, when you regretted that polygamy isn't permissible, that I suppose Dan would have something to say about Miss Pecici."

"Now, is that so?" cried the lawyer, delighted. "What a good thing for both of them! Dan needs just such a girl, and *she'll* get a mighty fine boy! I only hope," he added whimsically, "that her grandfather won't weep on Dan's shirt as he did on mine, poor old chap! Grief is noble, and gratitude is holy, but the odor of garlic is devilish."

"I dread to tell him she's gone again," I said.

"She's in no immediate danger, and I hardly think she's ever likely to be,"

said Roberts thoughtfully. "I expect a personal interview with Sergius Velmaroff very shortly," he continued rather anxiously. "Your Uncle William once told me that if Sergius secured the vault key from madame, he'd come back. He had arranged a little surprise for Sergius, he said. I don't know what he meant."

I thought of the myrtle ring by the Sand House, and I began to wonder myself.

He nodded, pleased, when I told him that madame had given me Olga, and that she had seemed glad and relieved.

"William hoped for this," said Roberts. "He said if you were worth Olga, you'd prove it. But he agreed to let you find out for yourself. You weren't to be prejudiced, one way or the other. *That's* why you were sent to Lost Island—blind."

"I'm only half-sighted yet," I answered, sulkily enough.

Wrapped in the sweetly sad haze of autumn, beyond the hedges the scrub oaks and sumac blazed in red and gold, and sweeping leisurely across the sky line, a flock of wide-winged gannets dropped into the green-and-orange marsh. The burned barn and the hastily turned mounds were the only external evidence of the struggle so lately raging around the Red House.

The cutter had not yet returned, but the surgeon expected her back by nightfall. She must have gone far into the marshes, chasing the escaping outlaws. The surgeon, who had been left behind to attend to madame and myself, came out on the veranda and joined us, Dan following. January dozed on the steps, every now and then turning alertly to watch his master.

"Got ter watch him," he explained to the doctor. "Dat boy's jest like flea—yo' clap yo' hand down, en he's done bitin' round some otheh place."

"I am concerned about the lady upstairs," said the surgeon, looking up

tentatively. "I have pulled her through for the time being, but the woman is a wreck—heart's gone. One more shock and she'll go—*so!*" Blowing a light breath, he extinguished an imaginary candle.

"Her time, then, is short," said Roberts deliberately. "For I think the shock you spoke of is coming—and soon." There was no mistaking his earnestness.

"May I ask who that lady is?" asked the doctor. "I have only heard her addressed as 'madame'—and her case—and her surroundings—" He hesitated.

Roberts gave me a curious sidewise glance.

"An American by birth, she is yet entitled to be called the Princess Velmaroff," he said quietly.

"Widow of Prince Nicolai Velmaroff, and mother to her highness, the Princess Olga." Smelkoff stood in the door behind us.

"Thank the Lord it isn't Angela!" said Dan, drawing a long, long breath.

But I did not see until afterward the gulf opening between us; I did not grasp the significance of that reference to Olga, my Olga.

"It was the wish of Monsieur Rave-nant, the elder, that his nephew was not to know—at once," went on Smelkoff. "Madame was to tell him when she had decided it was time to do so."

Roberts pointing to a seat, Smelkoff sank into it, folding his hands in his lap.

"I think the time has come," he said.

So, while madame lay dying upstairs, and Olga knelt beside her in the hushed and darkened room, Smelkoff told us.

The beautiful daughter of an American minister to the East, Elizabeth Beverly, fresh from Georgetown Convent, had met and loved Nicolai Velmaroff, then in the diplomatic service at Washington. There, too, William Rave-nant, then in the height of his



power, young, wealthy, noble-hearted, had met and loved her, for she had been wonderfully lovely. But the girl had preferred Velmaroff.

"He was the most beautiful and perfect man I have ever seen, Prince Nicolai," said Smelkoff simply.

So they had had a fairy romance, a fairy wedding. Later, the young man had taken the beautiful American to Russia. But, his elder brother dying within the year, he had inherited the title and estates; he must stay in Russia, for he had now become Prince Nicolai, head of the House of Velmaroff.

There was yet another brother—Sergius, born of a shopkeeper's daughter. Handsome, witty, unscrupulous, the woman had amused, entertained, and quarreled with the old Prince Velmaroff until she had won his lasting regard; he had come to look upon her as necessary to his happiness, although of course he had never entertained the idea of marrying her. For her child he had entertained a profound affection, for the boy had inherited his mother's beauty with her daring; he had added to this a rapierlike wit and an infamy all his own. In her way, the mother had loved the old prince, but she had adored her child; and as the boy had grown older, he had used both these indulgent beings for his own ends. He had even been allowed to assume the proud name of his father openly, and, their own mother being dead, the prince's two legitimate sons had shrugged their shoulders. Grown used to the beautiful boy, they, too, had become attached to this illicit member of the family. When the old prince had died, his sons had been willing enough to add liberally out of their own estates to the provision the boy's father had made for him. Young Sergius had been left to their charge.

He had grown up undisciplined, wild, and reckless. At twenty-one, he had married, for money reasons, into a

seminoble and wealthy family, and he had had one son, puny and delicate like his mother, an eyesore to an ambitious father. But in the meantime, Sergius' prodigal living, particularly his passion for gaming, had not only exhausted his brothers' patience, but his own and his wife's estate. The woman had died hating him for his injustice and his cruelty. Tales of that cruelty had crept outside; not being pleasant, they had not been mentioned openly in polite society.

And then upon the scene had appeared the Princess Elizabeth, Nicolai's exquisite American wife. Bad, base, depraved to the core of his soul, Sergius had conceived for this pure and beautiful girl one of those dark and terrible passions that are the bane of those upon whom such calamitous love is lavished.

His own illicit birth, his semi-Oriental mind, his natural bent of character, had given Sergius a certain attitude toward women—all women. He had not scrupled to make known his passion to the young wife, and to his astonishment and rage, he had been rejected with scorn and anger, as one who offers an unpardonable insult. This was new to Sergius; this was a woman who piqued his curiosity as well as his passion.

The princess had known that Sergius' affairs were in bad shape. She had known, too, that her husband still had a profound affection for his brother. More than this, she had known Nicolai's high sense of honor, his pride, his haughty temper. Hesitating to bring between them an estrangement, she had kept her own counsel, thinking that Sergius' ill-advised passion, thwarted, would die a natural death and so trouble her peace no more. She had not known Sergius!

Then had come the little Olga, and in her wonderful new happiness, the woman had forgiven her brother-in-

law; her happy and grateful heart had not been able to find room for enmity toward any human being.

They had adored their child, Prince Nicolai and his wife. It had been for her sake that they had begun to help so many people, people who had children, particularly. In loving kindness, and with an open hand, they had given whenever help had been needed, and it was always needed, Stefan said simply, in that sad country. But it is not wise to be too charitable there—one draws upon oneself suspicion; and these two had asked no questions, had listened to no advice, only had given to all who needed.

Sergius, unforgetting, unforgiving, had worked in the dark. Gathering this thread and that, he had woven a web. The freely given help, the outspoken condemnation of oppression, the interference with cruelty, the removing of victims from injustice—even once the aiding of a fugitive to escape—with all these Sergius had woven his web of intrigue and suspicion around his brother and his wife. The end had been easy to foresee, for when the Bear suspects, he crushes first, and—there are no questions to be asked or answered afterward.

In the middle of the night Prince Nicolai had been taken from his wife's side. He had kissed the sleeping baby and the white-faced mother; they had never seen him again. He had died in prison; not pleasantly, Smelkoff said, wetting his lips.

Olga had by then been almost three years old, and then had begun the martyrdom of Elizabeth Velmaroff, surrounded by spies, harassed, accused of being a nihilist supporter and sympathizer, almost a prisoner in her own house, for Sergius, now allied with the secret police, and therefore high in official favor, had managed to be made custodian of his brother's estates, guardian of his brother's young child.

Once only had the princess heard from her husband and that had been when Smelkoff's father, a soldier on prison duty, had smuggled her a note. He had been raised on Prince Nicolai's estate, that soldier, as Sergius shortly afterward remembered. After a while the soldier had been flogged and shot.

Stefan had been a very young man then, and he, too, had served in the army, which, strange to say, he had liked; he had even had some hopes of rising in the service. But he had gone to the princess, when he had received from his father a farewell message, and the plight of that mother and her child had pierced his heart with pity. They had been so alone! So, his term of service having expired, he had stayed with the woman and the child, for Prince Nicolai's sake.

About this time, too, Stefan had first seen William Ravenant, a tall, reticent, melancholy man of thirty, who had come to Russia to learn for himself that all was well with Elizabeth Beverly. He had loved her in her youth; he loved her now; and always he was to love and to serve her.

Sergius being in St. Petersburg then, Stefan, bribing two of the servants, had managed to allow William Ravenant to see the princess secretly. Ravenant had counseled instant flight, but they had faced a supreme difficulty. The government had been suspicious and watchful, and the princess had faced arrest and imprisonment at any moment. More than this, Olga, the child of a political offender and a suspected nihilist, was, under the Russian law, as the heiress of her house, the ward of the czar. Sergius was, indeed, her nominal guardian, but beyond him loomed the shadow of the Little Father. She could not openly leave Russia without the czar's consent, and only her small life stood between Sergius and his desire.

*The Velmaroff jewels!*

From generation to generation, the Velmaroffs had been jewel gatherers. Enormous sums had been expended for them in the course of the generations. They could not, perhaps, boast as many jewels as other collectors, but theirs were flawless, perfect, wonderful, each in its way unmatched. They had the great ruby called "Christna's Heart," and the great rose diamond "Flower of Allah." And the Velmaroff pearls were fabulous; not even the czarina wore such pearls as these. Sergius had begun to look toward the Velmaroff jewels when the great estates had begun to diminish under his management.

Strangely enough, these jewels had always been kept in the house, in a great modern steel safe just off the princess' boudoir. When William Ravenant had left that night, he had carried with him the most priceless of them. Two nights later, the princess and Olga, accompanied by Smelkoff, had fled from the castle, never to return. Miserable and dirty objects, in beggar's rags, bullied by the police, insulted by soldiers, by field and flood they had escaped, in spite of the desperate hunt set afoot. Ravenant's acute assistance, his help discreetly placed, had saved them; without that they must have fallen into Sergius' hands again. The rags and sheepskins covering their bodies—thin and worn enough by now—concealed the remaining Velmaroff jewels, as well as certain papers, titles, certificates, and so forth, which the princess had carried for Olga. Smelkoff's sheepskin had concealed, too, the two swords, later handed on to William Ravenant.

After considerable wandering, disguised as an emigrant family, they had at last left Russia to come to New York, going straight to an address furnished by Ravenant.

He himself had moved leisurely; he had appeared frequently in society, he had even been presented at court. No

one had suspected this calm, stately American of being the accomplice of the runaway princess. There had not been, apparently, the slightest clew to connect him with her flight. He had reasoned shrewdly that the two servants who had been bribed to admit him to the princess' presence would, afraid of certain destruction at Sergius' hands, hold their peace. Unsuspected, Ravenant had left Russia a full two months after his charges had reached New York.

But there had still been need of secrecy. The princess' father had been dead several years; she had had with her a young child, the ward of the czar, and she might be forced to return to Russia; she was herself a "suspect," hounded by one of the most powerful men in the empire, one with the entire Russian police at his command; and she had had the Velmaroff jewels. Her one safety had been in absolute concealment. Neither her life nor Olga's was safe, now, from Sergius.

Hiding in Washington, after leaving New York, Smelkoff, returning peacefully from market, had seen and recognized Volowski, whom he knew to be a creature of Sergius'. He had managed to turn a corner, even as Volowski had glanced casually across the street, and, chilled to the marrow by this narrow escape, he had hurried home. Later, he had seen the man passing by their very door. Then Smelkoff had insisted upon further flight, and William Ravenant had remembered the Red House on Lost Island, its complete isolation, its inaccessibility. Hither he had brought the woman he loved, with her child and Smelkoff.

Roberts had been necessarily taken into their confidence, and together the two men had shared the responsibility of caring for those precious lives on Lost Island, where, out of the world, in comparative security, the beautiful child had grown up. But the mother

had known that Sergius, knowing her to be in her own country, still hunted her with tireless sagacity, whetted by avarice and revenge, that for her no real safety existed upon an earth whereon he dwelt.

Madame had never ceased to mourn the husband taken from her so cruelly, and the future of the child had been an infinite source of worry to her. She had failed rapidly since William Ravenant's death, seeming unable to bear the loss of that strong, serene spirit upon which hers had leaned so many years.

What might happen to Olga, and he not by to save? Would she fall into Sergius' hands and be forced into an alliance with his weak and degenerate son, or be sacrificed, as her father had been before her, to his cruelty? The estates had sadly diminished, Ravenant had learned, and Sergius, using the police as a tool, sought tirelessly for the child and the treasure snatched from his grasp.

As we listened to Stefan's low voice, telling us this strange and incongruous story, so wild and unreal in the light of the peaceful scene before us, I began to wonder what change this new and stupendous knowledge would work in the lives of Olga and of me.

"A princess! That little girl!" ejaculated the doctor, whistling.

"Mademoiselle has just recently learned that she is so," said Smelkoff, with a wan smile. "She seems not to realize what it means. I hope," he added somberly, "that she will not have to." And he looked at me.

I remembered the promise madame had exacted from us both. But we had both been ignorant, then, of what lay between us. I could not hold Olga to such a promise—if she wished to go.

The surgeon came out of a brown study. He had been thinking of the key given to the Russians by madame, when they had taken Angela.

"And will they get the jewels from

the poor lady, after all?" he said regretfully. "It seems a pity to let that infernal scoundrel get them out of the vault!"

Smelkoff smiled grimly.

"Sergius will never touch the Velmaroff jewels, monsieur," he said quietly. "They are out of his reach, beyond his finding. He may open all the vaults under heaven—but he'll come here to ask us about their contents!"

Roberts, rubbing his grisly jaw with his bony hand, thrust out a pondering lip.

"The real question at stake," he said, "is not so much the jewels; it's whether or not our little Olga wants to be a princess and go back to her father's country. For she is not, after all, an American girl—she doesn't know anything about America; she's a Russian noblewoman—and the czar's ward."

"I wonder," said Dan, smiling. "I wonder!"

"It is not, perhaps, altogether with Mademoiselle Olga herself," said Smelkoff.

And he turned and looked at me, sitting silently and sorrowfully wondering about this new estate of Olga's; it was an anxious, speculative look. Then he went slowly indoors.

## CHAPTER XII.

The cutter returned in triumph, her men in high glee because they had captured all the outlaws and thus broken up a peculiarly dangerous gang. We had accounted for five, to whom Smelkoff, assisted by Neptune and a couple of sailors, had given hasty burial in the woods. The rest, with so clear a case against them, stood a chance of spending a considerable number of years behind bars.

After a long consultation between Roberts and her commander, the cutter returned to the city with the prisoners, leaving with us two sailors and the

surgeon; for madame was in a precarious way, I was invalided, and Dan's wounded cheek needed daily dressing.

Never was a man more excited and interested than that ship's surgeon; he was more than that—he was openly envious.

"Gad, but you fellows have had a bully time!" he grumbled, after Neptune had piloted him over to the Sand House, with its wrecked door. "I wish I'd been in it! Things like this are always over before I get there!"

"We-all ain't so plumb ambitious to git killed," said Neptune equably.

"You had a jolly fight!" lamented the surgeon.

"Well, suh, might be mo' comin' before you lef'," consoled the old negro, adding piously: "Gawd's good." And he stared at the suddenly hilarious M. D. with pained surprise.

Convinced that we must expect another visit from Velmaroff's agents, we had agreed to watch the river front. This duty the doctor, when not professionally engaged, took upon himself. He was, therefore, upon the wharf, sweeping the empty river disconsolately enough with his glasses, when far beyond the bend appeared a moving speck. He waited to see it take the shape of a naphtha headed for the island, then took to his heels joyfully.

"They're coming! They're coming!"

He came flying up the veranda steps into the hall, with a flushed face and sparkling eyes. One might have fancied him a boy going to a ball game.

"The women can stay upstairs," he remarked. "We fellows can have the shiny out right here in the hall, eh?"

"We ought to give them a warm welcome," said Dan gently. "I owe them something, myself."

Smelkoff said nothing; but he came from the dining room with the two swords under his arm and went up to madame's room. The rest of us, armed

and prepared, sat quietly in the hall and waited for what might happen.

An hour passed before they came, trampling through the garden and boldly entering the house. They had no reason to fear the folk at the Red House; did they not hold the little Princess Olga?

Between Volowski and Baerzev walked a tall and keen-eyed man. Heavily built, middle-aged, and merging upon grossness, he was yet strikingly handsome, though evil passions had sadly marred a once fine face. Pride, avarice, lust, cruelty showed in every line, and yet failed altogether to quench what must once have been unusual beauty. Walking with a strong and masterful stride, he had the easy assurance of one used to command and to obedience. He looked about him insolently with his large, almost Oriental eyes, and he held a lighted cigarette in a heavily jeweled hand—a wicked hand with fat, white, sensual fingers.

Stopping short at sight of the natty surgeon in his smart white uniform, and the grim, sallow lawyer who eyed him with open dislike and aversion, he stared at them and at the two cutter's men behind them, wondering what their presence here might mean. He had not been told of these in the report upon the Red House, as a lifted eyebrow and a stern glance of inquiry at his subordinates proved. They, looking with astonishment at these newcomers, spoke to their chief in low tones.

Roberts rose, holding up a hand for silence. His face was flint hard, and his voice had the ring of metal:

"I address Sergius Velmaroff?" No courtesy, here, from Roberts!

"Such," said the other, with a bow full of careless grace, "is my name, my good sir." He shot a rather quizzical glance at the bony attorney.

Unbending, inflexible, unfriendly, Roberts ignored bow and smile.



"What do you mean by invading the privacy of a gentleman's house?" he demanded bluntly.

The invader of a gentleman's house waved his white hand deprecatingly and smiled. His followers closed up and stood at his back.

"Let us understand each other," he said affably. "What you are pleased to term the privacy of a gentleman's house shelters, in the eyes of the Russian law, two criminals."

"Such a law be damned, sir!" snapped Roberts.

"It very often is, I assure you," said the other, and his teeth showed in his black beard. Thus far not the faintest ruffle of impatience had been allowed to mar his smooth appearance of good humor. "Nevertheless, in defiance of law, these two criminals have held the person of a ward of the crown, and they have also forcibly retained certain very valuable properties which are the rightful possession of that ward's and which should be in the keeping of the legal guardian." For a moment his self-possession failed; the veins stood out on his forehead, and his eyes narrowed to mere slits. He was not one who could lightly hold himself in leash. "So I am here as the deputy of my government to demand, along with the person of my ward, the properties that Elizabeth Velmaroff and Smelkoff, her servant, stole and fled with out of Russia."

Roberts shrugged.

"You are too crude in your methods," he said coldly. "It is not permitted that any one, even Sergius Velmaroff, can behave like a bandit in this country and get away with it. Present your claims and contentions to our government, backed by the proper credentials from your own, and if you can prove your assertions and your fitness for the charge, why, we may decide in your favor, who knows? But this forcible kidnapping of girls, this brigandish

breaking into peaceable homes, is contrary to *all* law and *all* equity!" he ended, with some heat.

The Russian lifted his cigarette to his lips, drew a contented puff, exhaled the smoke luxuriously, and smiled at Roberts.

"Upon an occasion a king of France remarked with great perspicacity and appositeness that he himself was the state," he said pleasantly. "I find myself forced to face certain circumstances, circumstances that, brought about by a silly and disaffected woman and an insubordinate servant, menace the welfare of my immediate family. I set about remedying these circumstances in my own way, and I say to you that in this case I am the state."

"So? It's one thing to imagine yourself the state—and you're in a devil of a state, permit me to remark in passing—and it's quite another thing to get sane men to agree with you. We choose to disagree with you. Therefore, we ask you to withdraw from a house that can have neither shelter nor welcome to extend to you. Is that plain enough?"

"Tut, tut!" admonished the Russian, as one addresses a refractory child. "Let me have the jewels—it will save you time and trouble. I am not accustomed," he added peremptorily, "to hedge about my orders or to bicker with pettifogging lawyers. I have come from Russia for that casket and its contents; I shall return with it!" The eyes narrowed again, and a white dent appeared about the nostrils. "Did you dream," said he menacingly, "that it would be safe to insult me with paste jewels, with insolent messages enumerating my supposed misdeeds? Did you think that I—I would tamely submit to such an outrage?"

His lips twitched and his face grew red with rage. One surmised that the surprise William Ravenant had said was in store for Sergius, should he ever

open that safe-deposit vault, had not been a pleasant one.

"I know nothing whatever about any jewels," said Roberts, with considerable asperity. "They were not in the vault? No? Then I, for one, have no faintest idea of their whereabouts."

Truth was so self-evident in his voice and face that Velmaroff, that shrewd observer of men, could not fail to recognize it. Something that was akin to respect crept into his face.

"One must respect him, that Ravenant!" he said grudgingly. "It is not often that a man so blinds and befools the secret police! He deceived even me," he added naively. "Had it not been that at last I got hold of one of those fools whom Smelkoff bribed, I should, perhaps, still be following idle clews.

"Even when we at last picked up the right trail, it was hard, very, very hard, to connect him with the case. He had a genius for hiding every thread of evidence and"—he hesitated for a second—"he was not amenable to reason—or pressure," he added gently. "We were at a standstill until Volowski by chance met a Mr. Tenney—an unloving relative is such a help! He mentioned Lost Island—and the rest was easy."

So that was how we had been nosed out! Tenney had had his chance to sneer about the strange will and about Lost Island, and they had simply put two and two together.

"It may be possible"—Roberts was frowning thoughtfully—"that Mr. Ravenant could have informed you about the jewels you speak of—if he had had them. But"—he looked meaningly at Sergius—"he is dead."

"But yes—he is dead," agreed the Russian blandly. "A dispensation of an obliging Providence, let us say." And the cold and significant effrontery of tone and manner I have never seen equaled.

"I thought as much!" murmured

Roberts, turning pale. "Indeed, I guessed as much!"

"Suppose you also guess that I wish to see my sister-in-law and that ruffian of hers?" suggested Velmaroff. "Truth to tell, we are losing time, and I dare say Olga is even now wondering what detains her dear uncle. She is a pearl of girls, is Olga. Not too near kin, either. Yes, I think I shall quite adore Olga!"

In the sudden grisly silence that fell upon us at that, he stamped his foot.

"I tell you I wish to see Elizabeth Velmaroff!" he shouted. "I *will* see her, and that brute of a Smelkoff! They have had their day—now it is mine! I have the girl, and, by Heaven, I will have the Velmaroff jewels with her! They go together, and they are mine!"

"You shall have neither, Sergius," said a low and intense voice.

In a glimmering gray gown that seemed to envelop her like a cloud, with a silvery scarf floating about her shoulders and her glittering, snowlike hair curling about her dead-white face, madame, between Smelkoff and Olga, was descending the wide stairs.

They looked unearthly, those three—madame like a wraith, the ghost of a woman, Olga rigid and white-lipped, Smelkoff pale and still, holding in each hand a sword. The eyes of the three were fastened upon the man who had so cruelly robbed and wronged them—the woman's with the calm, unhasting judgment of a spirit obeying the behest of God, the eyes of an angel passing sentence; Olga's full of horror and loathing; and Smelkoff's straight and fixed and menacing, like the sword blades in his hands.

At the foot of the stairs, madame paused and faced him. They regarded each other, God knows with what feelings, those two who had come through what stress of passion, what depths of terror and despair, to meet at last on Lost Island in the midst of the seas!

"No, you shall have nothing, Sergius," said madame again, with calm finality. She laid her transparent hand upon her breast, and her slight figure seemed to gather power and majesty. "I am at the end, and I see with the vision of the departing. I go to join him, thrust out of a world he graced, I go to accuse you before a mightier than the czar. She"—she laid her hand for a moment on Olga's—"is out of your reach. She will dwell in her mother's country; she will be happy in a good man's keeping; she will be safe. You dare not touch her. And, Sergius, William Ravenant had the jewels. Even I do not know where he put them—and he is dead."

She turned again to Olga and to Smelkoff, standing patiently waiting.

"This is Olga, Sergius, Olga, whose father perished because of you. This is Smelkoff, whose father died on your account, whose steps have been dogged by your orders. Stand up, Sergius, and answer now for the evil you have done us!"

She moved aside, and Smelkoff stepped forward. But Sergius waved him aside furiously. His eyes were glued upon Olga, in whose young face appeared, softer, sweeter, more beautiful and appealing, the image of the lost Prince Nicolai. He could not doubt the evidence of his senses. His eyes started and strained in their sockets.

He uttered a curse.

"Tricked, by God!" he yelled. "Ah, jade, thieving, lying, worthless baggage, impudent upstart!" He swung furiously upon madame, brandishing his fist in her face. "You shall pay for this, you and that hussy shut up in the cabin at the wharf! By God, you shall sweat for this, all of you! I——"

Calm, patient, unmoved, Smelkoff stepped up to him, holding out a sword.

"Take your father's sword, Monsieur Sergius," he said evenly, in a low

voice, "and defend yourself from your brother's."

Glaring about him, Sergius saw himself trapped in his own trap. There was no help for him from us. There was a sort of spell upon us; we felt that we were in the presence of a thing inevitable, to interfere with which would be to thwart divine justice. And as for Volowski and Baerzev and the two men with them, I do not think they were so particularly attached to the arrogant autocrat that they would willingly have risked themselves for him. They stood and stared with distended eyes at the ghostly and beautiful woman in gray, at the exquisite figure of Olga, at the tragedy rapidly unfolding before them.

"Take the sword," said madame quietly.

He snatched it with a curse, to lunge and be driven back. And now we saw with astonishment and awe and delight a display of skill on the part of Smelkoff that left us gasping. He must have had a vision of this that was even now happening, and all these years he must have been preparing himself to meet it. And he needed every ounce of skill and coolness, for Sergius, although he was heavy with gross living, had been a noted duelist in his time and was still no mean antagonist.

For a time he fought with all the fire and ardor of his lost youth, at first with the rash determination to kill his man at once and have done with; but later, when Smelkoff refused to be killed out of hand, he used his weapon with the skill that borders on desperation. Stefan beat him off with consummate art. Into his calm, gray, patient eyes had crept a strange red light, though his face never for a moment lost its marble immobility. He hardly seemed to breathe, but, moving with the unalterable precision of a fixed law, he seemed less a man than a something destined to accomplish an inevitable result.

Nobody moved or spoke; we stood rigid as statues, with faces pale as the dead and eyes unable to tear themselves from that dreamlike scene before us. The hushed hall rang with the sharp clang of steel meeting steel, the thud of two pairs of nimbly shifting feet; one heard also Velmaroff's short, panting breaths. Twice he succeeded in scratching Smelkoff, who paid no more attention to the slight cuts than one pays to a pin prick. Once he very skillfully feinted, following it up with such a lightning thrust that we thought, with a stopping of the heart, that here was an end to Stefan; it seemed impossible that he should not have been spitted. But Stefan parried with an almost incredible ease and quickness, turning aside his opponent's point.

And still we dared not move; we were almost afraid to breathe; we could only stare with strained eyes at those two playing tag with death. Madame stood with her hand on Olga's shoulder, erect, reposeful, with a certainty chilling to witness.

Velmaroff began to give way. His muscles were soft from years of indulgence and ease and sloth and sin, and they were growing weary; Nature was revenging herself upon him for his misuse of her. But Smelkoff's, hardened to iron by the plow handle, by outdoor work, by simple living and a clean life, never felt the strain put upon them now. Trained to wide horizons, to sun and sea and plains of shimmering marshes, his eye was eaglelike in its quickness, its piercing strength of vision.

Velmaroff's lunges grew wilder. Steadily his mottled and inflamed face grew pale, and a hunted look crept into his bold eyes. Unable to look for any outside help, trapped, he had to face that gray-bloused figure that, holding in a wrist of steel his brother's sword, suddenly seemed to assume the stern and relentless aspect of Destiny; he had

to meet and look into those inexorable eyes that foresaw his end before it overtook him.

He must have gone desperate. Giving back slightly, he turned, doubling his body with a sinuous grace in spite of his unwieldy bulk, and with an upward-driving thrust, like a lightning flash, his sword shot at Smelkoff's heart—and missed, was turned aside. Even as he straightened to renew the attack, the sword in Stefan's hand leaped forward like a sentient thing.

"For Nicolai!" cried Smelkoff in fierce Russian, and ran him through the heart.

For a horrible second he stood still, transfixed, and his anguished eyes stared at Smelkoff with an almost ludicrous astonishment. Then the mottled color seemed to leap out of his face, over which spread a gray as of fine cigar ash. He twitched all over, clawed once with his outstretched hand, and fell backward, the force of his fall withdrawing the sword, but leaving free egress to an uprush of dark red.

"Madame! Look to madame!" screamed Roberts, leaping forward and breaking in upon the trance of horror that held us.

On the floor at her feet lay Sergius, face upturned, his glazing eyes staring awfully up at her. Even as his closed, hers flickered, and she wavered and fell. Clutching at her heart, but without uttering a sound, she sank down beside him.

Smelkoff cast aside his sword, stooped, caught her in his arms, and bounded upstairs with her, the surgeon, after a glance at the man on the floor, following him. The Russians lifted Sergius and laid him on the library table, among William Ravenant's books. A Bible that bore William Ravenant's name was under his head.

As for madame, the end had come, as she had said. She had gone to rejoin the love of her youth, so passion-

ately mourned; perhaps, too, to meet loyal William Ravenant and to accuse Sergius. Olga clung to me in speechless grief, stunned by the suddenness of the tragedy that had invaded her quiet home.

Dan came in presently with Angela, whose presence in the launch had been betrayed by Sergius' burst of passion. His men had made no attempt to detain her. It was not Angela they had wanted. She met the stares of Volowski and Baerzev with a composed face.

"The fortunes of war," she reminded them, with gentle irony.

They looked at her with admiration.

"You might be a Russian!" they told her.

"I am too busy trying to be an American," said Angela.

Presently they took what was left of Sergius Velmaroff away, to give him Christian burial and to send a carefully worded dispatch to the home government. Now that death's healing hand had touched him, one could see how great had been his promise, how beautiful he must have been. So, stripped of all, he left Lost Island, and with him went the secret of William Ravenant's death.

But the little frail princess remained, to sleep in the garden of the Red House, near old Sam. Smelkoff made her a coffin that looked like a child's, and Angela dressed her all in purest white and filled her thin hands with the garden's last pale roses.

The next morning Smelkoff and I, both very silent and depressed, rode over to the Sand House, this time on a different errand. The shadowy, scented woods were honeyed with autumn flowers and haunted by the voice of the sea, a mournful voice that suited my mournful thoughts. For I had to face a new situation—that Olga was a great lady, that hers were the fabulous and priceless Velmaroff jewels, and that I

was just William Ravenant—and *mine* was Lost Island, just that and no more. In honor, I should have to give her up.

Stefan had brought sack and spade. Measuring carefully from a clump of myrtles growing in a circle, he dug from that secret and secure burial place two heavily wrapped caskets, ripping off their many canvas coverings with his knife.

"Two?" I asked dully.

I had no desire to look upon the Velmaroff jewels, the accursed jewels that must separate Olga and me.

"We will open them in the Red House. And we will see what we will see," said he stolidly.

We rode back as silently as we had come forth. Neither of us uttered a dozen words on that eventful journey. As we drew rein at the Red House gate, Smelkoff looked up and spoke with passion.

"They are the child's, those baubles," he said harshly. "For them have men and women died. For them the princess was hunted, I am in exile, Sergius is damned! I would to God I could bury them in the river mud!"

He dismounted, stalked into the house and upstairs to my room, I following.

How they sparkled and shone and flashed and glowed and glimmered and gleamed! How they danced like witch fires, like moonlight, like wine, like tears, like blood! It seemed to me that the great ruby for which Sergius would have given his soul bubbled with a red glow like his blood on Smelkoff's sword. But the far-famed "Flower of Allah" seemed to me less bright than Olga's eyes, the Velmaroff pearls darkened next to the beauty of her creamy throat. As I clapped the cover upon them, I smiled indulgently. It was I who had had the real, living "Flower of Allah," if I could only have held it!

Smelkoff broke the seals of the other



box, and, after a glance, silently pushed it toward me. A letter lay on top:

If I had done you the great wrong of burdening your untied shoulders with great wealth, before you had had the chance to learn and to know what I like to think you will have learned and know when you read this; if I had done this, and thus betrayed you to temptation and flattery and adulation, to all that unreal world which is the only world the very rich may see, I do not think you could thank me as you thank me now, as you will thank me even more later. I have given you the chance to win a love worth while, a heart unspotted and unspoiled. If it is your great good fortune to win it, then do so, but remember that for a woman, love is the only happiness life can hold, and by it, and it only, is any man such as his Maker meant him to be. Treat your divine guest tenderly, giving him your bread and wine with clean hands and a clean heart.

As for what this box holds, take it; it is yours. Only, use it well and wisely. I think you will do so without any further advice of mine. I have seen you grow under my eyes, and I have watched you with such pride and such hope as you may not guess. Such a son as I hoped to have, once, you have been to me.

Accept my gift with my love. And oh, make Olga, the child of my one love, as happy as I used to dream I could make her mother. And so farewell, and God bless you, and those of yours who are to come and to bear the Ravenant name.

YOUR AFFECTIONATE UNCLE.

There it lay, the lost Ravenant fortune—all the vanished bonds and certificates and shares and securities, bidding their time under the myrtles by the Sand House. I was glad and proud to hand one paper to Smelkoff, made out in his name and lifting him forever above want. He received it with deep emotion.

"I grow old," he said sadly. "And, monsieur, old age troubled me. This lightens my burdens and makes my path easy."

I put the letter in my breast, but I am sorry to say I thrust the Ravenant fortune carelessly enough under the bed, until Smelkoff, with an exclamation of horror, seized it and bore it off.

"When you are prepared to care for it properly, you may have it," said he indignantly. "In the meantime, with your permission, this box remains in my keeping."

The Ravenant fortune didn't interest me so greatly as the change in Olga's estate. That fairy princess had come into her kingdom and needed no more rescuing. The death of Sergius had smoothed her path; there was no longer any necessity for concealment, and a dazzling life spread before the young and beautiful girl. She could take her proper place among the great of the earth, a place far above a simple gentleman's aspirations. I realized that to the full. It tasted bitter in my mouth.

We had decided that when the cutter returned for Roberts and the surgeon, we would return to the city with them. There was no reason why we should remain on Lost Island, Roberts insisted, and he was anxious to get Olga away from a place that must remind her of her mother's sad end. Smelkoff, too, was anxious to go. He was homesick for Europe, and he planned to reside in France for a while, that being as near as he would venture to Russia, for the time being. Neptune and the other negro servants would take care of the Red House during our absence, keeping it in shape for my return at any time I might fancy to see the place again. As for Angela and Olga, they were to stay indefinitely with my Aunt Trescott.

"Angela can stay with Olga until I get a home ready for her, which will be just about as soon as I can get to town and rustle up enough stuff to start housekeeping," said Dan determinedly. "I'm not a multimillionaire, but I think I've enough to start life on, and she's willing to risk it, bless her! No waiting for me. I know what I want and I'm going to grab it while it's there to grab. Besides, what's the use of wait-

ing? I wouldn't love her any more or any less ten years from now, would I?"

"He is very rash!" sighed Angela.

"He is very wise," said I.

"Think so?" asked Dan. "Then hadn't you better imitate my good example?"

"I wish I could," said I truthfully. For the trouble of Olga's fate was growing upon me. I wished to be fair to her. How could I make her see that she wasn't a mere pretty girl, but a great lady, before whom the world would delight to bow down in admiration of her name, her youth, her beauty, her romantic fate, her great fortune? How should I explain this, and find the grace to give her up?

Dan, going about with an absurdly happy face in spite of the sticking plaster on it, found me sitting moodily in the library and sat on the arm of my chair.

"Why look as if you'd been sucking green persimmons?" he demanded, swinging his long legs.

I explained, at some length.

Dan considered it. Then he shook his head.

"Stuff!" he said. "Title, indeed! A fat lot of good her title would have done her, if it hadn't been for your uncle and Lost Island! A fat lot of good it will do her if you turn her out alone in the world, a young girl, a prey to every fortune hunter! If Olga agrees to let you do that, why, she's not the girl I thought her, and there's a big surprise coming to me."

"But you don't understand——"

"I do understand that if it were Angela, I'd take her by the back hair and yank her to the nearest parson, if I had to. And I do understand she'd put in the rest of her natural life thanking God and me that I did it. Any right-minded girl would!"

Then he went out to join Angela and the surgeon in the garden, leaving me uncomfortable and unconvinced.

The room was growing dusky. Long, soft shadows were creeping through the barred windows. I rose reluctantly and was moving to the door when Olga entered, a slight and appealing figure in her dark dress, her little face softly luminous in the twilight. She closed the door after her and ran to me with outstretched hands.

"Oh!" she breathed. "I haven't seen you all day, and I have been sad and lonesome, and I wanted to be with you! I wanted to be with you!" She crept close to me, with a sigh of content. "You are all I have—now," she added wistfully.

As for me, I found my throat dry; I could not speak to her—yet. She was too dear and precious to me.

"What is wrong?" she asked presently, peering up at me. For I had not dared to show her how deeply I felt her presence; I had refrained from touching the thick black hair so close to my shoulder. "Will! Dear Will!" Her voice was full of a vague alarm. "You are not well? It is that wound that makes you suffer? Will dear, let me call that doctor to see you!"

"Wait," said I.

Forced to answer, I told her the truth lamely, baldly, but explaining with great care and detail the differences in her estate and mine, the changes Sergius Velmaroff's death had made in her affairs. When I had ceased, she sighed.

"That is all? That is enough to make you wear so sorrowful a face, to refrain from loving me?" she wondered, with a hint of contempt.

"It is enough. Oh, foolish child, don't you see what judgment the world would place upon me should I marry you now, before you've had a chance to see and to judge for yourself?"

"Ah!" said Olga thoughtfully. "And my mother and your uncle, they also should have thought of the fine judg-

ment of that world, before they came here to the Red House, is it not so?"

I was silent.

"You said you loved me!" she sighed. "And—have you forgotten what you promised my mother?"

"I do love you. And I have not forgotten. I do not give you up lightly, for a Ravenant can't forget."

"You love your silly pride more than me."

"Olga!"

"Oh, but yes! Else would you hug false pride—instead of true *me*? To wish to give me up—for an empty word or two, a few trinkets!"

"A great title, a king's ransom!" I insisted.

But she turned her face aside, so that I gave a cry of pain. Life without Olga was empty and black and bitter. It held nothing for me. At the cry, she turned swiftly and flung her soft weight against me, brought her warmth, her freshness, her loveliness, into my arms.

"If you make me go, I shall first throw those dreadful jewels into the river and then I shall die! Of a truth I shall die—with great quickness!" said Olga. "I can't live at all if I can't live happily, and I can't live happily if I cannot love *you*!" For a moment she leaned against me, waiting for me to speak. And as I remained silent, "Poor, poor, lonesome Love, driven out into the cold and the dark!" said Olga softly. "Will, call him in! If he dies in the dark, we shall freeze and die, too. Call him in!"

"I never sent him out," I said.

"I believe, me, that he would refuse to go," said Olga. "Love is of too much wisdom to go at Pride's bidding. And—you promised my mother, my dear mother, to hold fast to me. And

you are all I have. Bend your head. So! Ah, silly, silly boy, that was on the nose!"

A little later——

"And *now* you will understand that of a truth you and I *belong*, as Dan says?"

"You and I belong."

But I had at the time but one good arm.

"Oh, poor, poor shoulder!" mourned Olga. "I am of a great carelessness, no? It does not hurt now? Well, then, to please you, monsieur, I will lean against the other one."

That shoulder had been made for Olga's darling head.

The door opened, letting in the subdued light of the old Venetian hall lantern and the pleasant murmur of voices from the piazza. Smelkoff stood regarding us with his mild, inscrutable eyes, so wise and so sad. His manner was perfectly serene, as if no frightful emotions had ruffled and ravaged that amazing, half-Oriental Russian soul of his.

"Monsieur and mademoiselle," said Smelkoff pleasantly—and one noticed that he did not address her as "highness"—"I serve dinner in half an hour. I think to serve an old wine, a wine of a magnificent vintage, which Monsieur Ravenant, the elder, left here to be used—upon occasions. It is well?"

He looked at us searchingly, with something hopeful and tender and fatherly in his gray eyes.

As for us, we looked back at him just as steadily, but with more of happiness. I fancy that happiness, in spite of the tragedy that had touched us, in spite of the grief we naturally felt for the little lost lady, must have exhaled from us like an aroma. And then Olga spoke.

"It is *very* well, Stefan," she said.



# The Shoe Upon the Other Foot

By Anne O'Hagan

Author of "The Awakening of Romola,"  
"The Friend of Her Heart," etc.

**D**O you think," he asked her, with that manner of restrained passion, of mature wisdom, of tender amusement, which swept so strongly against all her youthful defenses, "do you think, my dear girl, that you were meant for the humdrum lot of the humdrum woman?"

He let it die there, a question too obvious to require answer. His tired eyes, whose weariness held a fascination so much more potent than the unclouded eyes of the boys she had known, dwelt upon her with the look that shook her heart. The humdrum lot of the humdrum woman seemed to her no longer the bright, "divine, far-off event to which the whole creation moved," but something gray, uninteresting, negligible, almost sordid. And yet Loraine Fosdick was not a fool. She was merely a young woman of twenty-three, for the first time under the spell of a dominant magnetism and experienced charm.

Webster watched the play of ideas across her mobile face with genuine interest, genuine admiration. It was a delightful face, and its delight was not measured alone in terms of gracious contour and coloring, in a piquant irregularity of chiseling, but in the emotional and spiritual capacities it expressed. Webster, long a connoisseur in women's looks, told himself that a glad renaissance of youth awaited the

man who awoke the possibilities of that rich nature—provided, of course, that he had come to the time of life when the passionate exploration of a woman's nature was not instinctive. If he himself, for example—

"But you know," Loraine was saying, meeting his gaze with her air of candor, "you know that I am already pledged to the humdrum lot of the humdrum woman, if by that you mean marriage. I am engaged to a man back home."

"If you told me that you were married to a man back home," replied Webster, tranquil under the information, "that would not change my contention. I should know either that he was a glorious person with whom your life was to be adventure and tumult, or that—he would drop from your existence in due time, and that you would go on to your predestined experiences. But engaged! Of course you are. You could never get through that freshwater coeducational institution out of which you have told me you were graduated with such a lot of learning"—he laughed teasingly—"without being engaged. And now when are you going to break the engagement?"

"To——" she began. But she colored deeply.

"To break it," he repeated firmly. "Of course, that's what all early engagements are made for—to break.

They're like a baby's first gestures, merely practice strokes, mere muscle developers. When are you going to break that engagement? I"—he leaned across the table toward her, and the weariness went out of his gray eyes—"I have rather an extraordinary interest in that question, Miss Fosdick—Lorraine."

"I'm not sure that I am going to break it. I—I—I was quite young when it—happened. I——"

"Of course you didn't know the meaning of love," he interposed for her. "You were a bookish youngster. And he——"

"Alan has just finished the theological school," she told him. "We were in the same class in college. We—— It happened when we were graduated—that week. He had the divinity school to get through. I—had to earn my living. That was why I had been let go through college. And I came to New York, and—I haven't seen him for three years. It seems, perhaps, a little pale, all of it, a—a little unsubstantial. Yet——"

"I know," he interrupted her confidently. "I know all about it. Yet you can't bear to hurt his feelings by mentioning the fact that it all seems unreal and unsubstantial. Yet you are half inclined to think that it would be easier, and nobler, to sacrifice yourself than to break your engagement. You think it would break his heart." He laughed tolerantly. "Well, if young hearts were made to be broken, it might break a boy's to lose you. But they aren't made of such brittle stuff. Besides"—he grew more earnest—"don't you know, dear girl, that you are insulting the young man and are planning a sacrifice for him, too—an injury? A man"—his face set itself in bitter lines that declared his age, the mask of tired youth dropping from him—"a man has a right to a woman's utmost ardor. If he doesn't get it, in mar-

riage, he is cheated. I know all about that, you see."

"You?" Her thoughts went winging toward him, away from her own problem. Pity lighted lamps in her eyes.

"Ah, don't be too sorry for me, Lorraine! What a lovely name you have! Lorraine! The fair, desired province! But about me—don't be too sorry for me. I dare say I got what I deserved, and, anyway, I'm an old fellow and have lived down my disillusion. I can get on very comfortably, thank you. Or I have been getting on very comfortably——" He broke off, and looked at her with eyes that sent the blood pulsing affrightedly in her veins.

"I—I didn't know anything about it—about you. I——"

"Surely the staff at Coudray, Greene, and Webster's has not left you in ignorance of my poor affairs? Yes? You astonish me. See where his egotism will carry a man. I supposed Miss Stebbins and the rest had talked about me by the hour and that there was no detail on my poor story you didn't know."

She forced a smile for his self-mockery, but beneath the table edge her hands were clenched. It was suddenly imperative that she should know all about him, no matter how the knowledge hurt. She had a prescience that it was going to hurt.

"They have left the task of enlightenment to you," she managed to say easily.

"They probably knew you wouldn't be ever so mildly interested. It was like my conceit to think that perhaps you would be."

"But of course I am."

"A perfectly commonplace story, Miss Fosdick." He had returned to the formal use of her name. "When I was a young man—about the age of this Alan you are contemplating a fraud upon—I married. I thought I was loved for myself alone——"



"Oh, please don't jeer!" Her voice was poignant.

"Isn't it better to jeer? No, I suppose not. I suppose it is always in better taste, at least, to recount our tragedies, and our farces, too, in the vein of sober narrative. Well, then, I married thinking that my wife was altogether in love with me, as I thought I was altogether in love with her. Neither of us had any conception, I dare say, of the meaning of love; I am pretty sure I had not, though I was ready to learn—that I swear. And I am quite sure she had not. She had married a Webster and a fair income—a suitable person, that was all. You don't want me to go on. I waked up to a disappointment. We have lived an unhappy life."

"You—you are divorced?"

Loraine blushed as she asked the question. It seemed to her young generosity a prying, mean-spirited one. In the presence of tragic matters, she was petty to consider conventions. Still, she was dining with him alone in the pretty restaurant. It was not the first time. She had a right to know if she were compromising herself.

"No, we are not divorced. My wife"—he smiled grimly—"does not believe in divorce, and God knows she gives me no ground for seeking one myself. She is impeccable in female virtue—the only virtue required by tradition of you women!—and, for the rest, I haven't cared. We go our respective ways, practically separated. I believe that my way is looked upon somewhat askance by the more Puritanic members of the community. That is why I thought you might have heard of my foolish, commonplace little tragedy—people like a dish of scandal, you know. If—if you had known before, would it have made any difference to you? Would you have been less—kind to me?"

"I don't know," she replied. "Or—

yes, I suppose I should have been—less kind, as you call it. I—suppose I am rather conventional about such things."

"Your friendship—your little gift of comradeship—has meant more to me," he told her, "than anything that has happened to me since—well, since I was a boy. You know I am thirty-nine now. And after sixteen arid years, I come upon this divine spring of refreshment. You aren't going to drive me away, are you, Loraine?"

When he looked at her like that, with hunger and adoration in his tired eyes, her heart seemed to be water in her bosom, her wrists seemed water. She was dissolved in pity, in—what was it? Love? Surely not! He was married—there was Alan—

"If my friendship means anything to you—" she said, a little unsteadily.

"It means—I will show you what it means," he told her intensely. "If you will let me, I will show you what it means."

## II.

Loraine had broken her engagement with Alan Burton. That had finally come to seem to her the merely honest course. Whatever the new feeling that was threatening to absorb all her powers might be called—love, comradeship, friendship, or whatever—it plainly forced Alan too far out of her mind to allow the engagement to continue. She told herself that it was wholly because she desired to be honest and just that she broke the frail bond their youth and inexperience had woven back there in Hadlayville. But something within her that was not herself—a troublesome something that was always questioning and criticizing her—asked whether she had not got rid of Alan as a reckless tobogganist might throw aside all encumbrances before starting upon his descent to the unknown foot of the steep. She grew sometimes very cross with the

something within her that was not herself, but that was always sitting in judgment upon herself.

She herself reasoned it all out very logically, very satisfactorily. She was, so she declared in her self-communings, a free woman. That did not mean that she was going to do anything really outrageous; it only meant that, so long as she could command her own self-respect, she would take what she pleased of Harrington Webster's friendship, would give him of hers all that he could in honor take. She was robbing no woman, and he, Webster, was robbing no man. On the contrary, they were enriching each other's lives without defrauding any other mortal by a jot or a tittle, even granting the justice of that old notion of proprietorship in affection. There would be no question of crass love-making; they lived on too high a plane.

And then sometimes the girl's eyes would close, and her breath would come in little trembling waves, as she reached this point in her self-examinations. What need for the touch of hands, of lips, for the crudities of words, when their hearts could speak so plainly from their eyes? They loved, but nobly, nobly! They would yield nothing of that nobility to the weak yearnings of the flesh.

They saw each other a great deal—many times a day. Miss Fosdick had had a secretarial training at Hadlayville, in addition to the more purely academic and ornamental courses, and she was old Mr. Coudray's secretary, amazingly alert, efficient, competent. That somewhat irascible gentleman used to wonder how he had managed before chance had sent her drifting into his stenographic force and sheer ability and training had swiftly promoted her. Coudray used to hope devoutly that she would never marry; he had a vague impression that she was eminently marriageable from the point

of looks, but that was as far as his personal observation of her extended.

The junior member of the firm was able, of course, to make many opportunities each day to see her. Mere glimpses were achieved by his stratagems, but they were glimpses at once satisfying and strangely stimulating. The two both rejoiced in the fact that she worked in the office. Webster, who had never happened to give the matter a thought before, declared that there was no comradeship like that of a man and a woman who worked side by side, and Loraine subscribed to the truth and wisdom of that assertion. If he had met a woman like her long ago, he intimated, there would be no clamorously foolish pages in his book of experience.

They did not go about together much. Webster, it may be, was a trifle weary of going about, and one of Loraine's chief attractions for him was that she was so piquantly different from the type of young woman with whom a man in his anomalous position was likely to be seen in public. Occasionally they went to the opera or the theater, choosing inconspicuous seats; semioccasionally they sat in the bright glare of the electric lights in the drawing-room of the woman's hotel where Loraine dwelt and achieved a jerky conversation under the eyes of many aimless, desultory, gray-haired women. But for the most part they dined together in out-of-the-way restaurants, and lingered long over their coffee. Sometimes, on Saturdays or Sundays, they took country expeditions together, choosing, with meticulous care, routes by which his thousands of acquaintances would not possibly be traveling to this country club or that. Loraine, who had once disdained everything clandestine, ceased, after a while, to find the situation repugnant; and while her life narrowed in upon her, shutting her in to absorptions and pre-occupations that made an old-fashioned woman's inclosure of four walls look

wide and spacious, she seemed to herself to be breasting ever-ampler waves of freedom, nobility—life.

She had her hours of restrained jealousy. There were too many evenings when neither the out-of-the-way restaurant nor the brightly lighted hotel drawing-room was possible to them. Harrington Webster, despite the fact that Mrs. Harrington Webster's health demanded that she live always in California, Honolulu, Italy—anywhere where Harrington did not happen to be sojourning—was bound up in the social life of the city. He had been born into it; his mother still lived, stately and white-haired, a storybook *grande dame*, in the old Webster house on North Washington Square, and she was by no means an inactive figure in fashion, in her well-preserved early sixties. His sister, Vivian, Mrs. Jimmy Heath, had her name in the paper at least once a day as "among those present" or as entertaining others. There were cousins, connections, old friends, new friends.

Harrington professed a distaste for the activities of his set, and, indeed, did not participate largely in them. But even his partial touch with the idle life of the town left gaps in his intercourse with Loraine that it required all her philosophy to endure without question.

He often spoke of introductions to be managed between his family and her; he was flatteringly sure that his mother would find her most sympathetic, and that as for Vivian, they would be twin souls. But the opportunity never seemed to come for the meeting that should be effective for permanent acquaintance and yet seem casual, unpremeditated.

Loraine, sturdy democrat though she was, with the ideals and standards of a sturdily democratic Western community behind her, realized that democracy was not triumphant in New York, and that however irrefutable might be

all her theories as to woman's economic independence, and however immeasurably more dignified the lot of a self-supporting Loraine Fosdick than that of a parasitic Madame Webster or Vivian Webster Heath, the Webster ladies would be blandly ignorant of their inferiority, and would merely regard her as "one of the girls who worked in Harry's office." That knowledge helped to soften whatever disappointment she felt at the unachieved meetings with Harrington's mother and sister.

The feelings of the two gained in intensity, as was foreordained. The very restraint they put upon themselves, the very secrecy they practiced in their meetings, were potent agents to intensify their emotions. As nothing stands still in nature, but is bound either to increase or to diminish, as every seed must dwindle to death or must push its way through darkness to blossom in the light, so it was with these two. Day by day repression increased their passion.

"Loraine," he told her one evening when he had not seen her for three days and when the faces of both were pale with the strain of that separation, "this can't go on. It can't go on, my dear. I love you wholly, entirely, as a man—and I can't stand this. It's cruel and unfair to you, too. We must end it, one way or another."

"One way or another?" repeated Loraine, with whitening lips.

He seemed immeasurably older, wiser, firmer than she, as she looked at him. Yet, since they had first confessed their feelings for each other, boyishness had come back to his face. How dear he was!

"Yes. Either our love must have its way, its right, its natural, its Heaven-ordained way, or we must separate entirely. My arms are empty for you, my sweet, and my mouth is hungry. If

I can't have you, I must go away again."

Through her parted lips, a little breath ran shudderingly.

"It is, of course, wholly for you to decide, Loraine," he told her gravely.

From the campus at Hadjayville, vague ghosts gathered about her— young faces looked longingly at her, their friend, their comrade. She saw the plain, austere house where she had lived, the aunt and uncle who had reared her.

"I can't," she whispered wretchedly, answering his unspoken plea. "I can't."

He sat very still for a minute, his face growing more and more fixed and white. All his other loves seemed trifles in comparison with this one, which was denied him.

"The decision is with you. It shall be as you say," he told her.

And so, according to the ancient custom of unhappy lovers, they took an eternal farewell of each other. Loraine believed, in her inexperience and in youth's great credulousness for finalities, in the permanency of that farewell; and even Webster was sufficiently under the spell of the new passion to have no wise, cynical, amused guesses as to their next meeting.

—It came, of course. There was the office—where Loraine's work had suddenly fallen off and caused old Cou-dray to wonder if she was contemplating the treachery of matrimony. Not that it would greatly matter, if she continued to be so imperfect a secretary! There was the office—and of course Webster could not overnight arrange a plausible mission for himself at the ends of the earth; he was still obliged to appear on Broad Street. And for a day or two hungry eyes met hungry eyes across desks and chairs and indifferent backs. And then—

"I must see you again—once!"

That happened three times. It was Loraine who brought the matter to a

head. Something—native honesty, her course in secretary work, business life—something, at any rate, made it impossible for her to persevere forever in self-deception. They met again, over the obscure restaurant table, and she talked to him.

"I've been thinking," she told him. "We can't go on this way. You said it once, and I know it now. There's no rest for us, no settled peace. Even my work suffers, and mine is mere routine! Yours——"

"Oh, the work!" He dismissed it contemptuously; as a rich man, he could afford to scorn its demands.

"Yes, but it is important. Next to love, it's the most important thing in the world. You must be free to do yours—and it is for me to set you free. I must either take myself out of your office and out of your life or——"

She paused. The silence hung heavy between them. He leaned toward her breathlessly.

"Loraine!" His voice was broken. "Loraine! Or—what?"

She had been looking at the rim of her plate. At first she did not raise her eyes to meet his, but a blush began at the open neck of her blouse and traveled up the sweet, good young face to the edge of her hair. He held his breath. She raised her eyes, bright, tender, meek, pitifully prayerful.

"Oh, Harry!" she whispered. "If—if it should not be real—our love! If it should not be right! If you should come to—to—think of me lightly!"

There was no taint of guile in his heart as he swore to her that his love was deep and reverent and that it would be more deep, more reverent, with each day that he lived. So renovating had the new love been to his heart that he forgot he had ever sworn the same thing before! And then, brokenly, shamefacedly, mortified to disfigure the moment of her surrender with ugly recollections, he told her that he would

try once again to induce his wife to grant him a divorce. Loraine's face was crimsoned again as she listened, but she nodded, with averted eyes.

And gradually the moment of high tension passed, and he told her how admirable and noble she was, and how the world was some day to be brought to the recognition of love and love alone as the basis of union between men and women. She listened with averted eyes and nodded her agreement.

### III.

Mr. Harrington Webster, debarred by the vagaries of his wife's health and disposition from having an established, conventional home in New York, had made himself for many years quite comfortable in an apartment de luxe. It was in a good neighborhood; it was near Vivian's little jewel of a house, and within walking distance of his favorite club. A discreet pair of Japanese servants ordered his existence for him, and he fared sumptuously every day.

On the evening or the day after Loraine had arrived at her momentous decision, she went for the first time to his apartment and for the first time she felt his arms about her, his lips upon hers. But the rapture of the moment was for her horribly colored by nervousness. And the exquisite dinner which the Japanese, outdoing themselves, served them, found her without appetite or appreciation. Harrington, however, managed to eat with the air of one whose anxieties were over.

To overcome her nervousness, he exerted all his charm; he talked well, describing places he had been, touching with a light humor on phases of character he had seen. And now and then he interrupted himself in his playing of the part of graceful host to let some sentence, abrupt and broken, declare how, beneath the light assurance and

happiness of the moment, his heart was tumultuous with love and gratitude.

At the beginning of the dinner, when, in her haste to have her position cleared, she would have directed the talk upon themselves and upon their future, he denied her.

"You're as nervous as a kitten," he said. "I'll wager you ate no lunch. Come now, tell me the whole truth—was it malted milk you took for sustenance at noon, or tea and a wafer? There's to be no more of that, young lady. That superb vitality of yours is to be maintained by proper nourishment. Ah, Loraine, to think that I shall have the joy of taking care of you after this! My dear, my dear!" And his voice fell away into silence, while his eyes enveloped her with tenderness and promise.

It was with a feeling of relief that she finally saw the Japanese remove the uneaten dessert and set upon the table exquisite little decanters of liqueur and tiny glasses, shaped like flowers, and, accepting Harrington's "Nothing more, thank you, Sagi," disappear from the dining room. At last the moment had come when they could talk together, when they could plan a future of orderly seeming. And though Harrington seemed to think that the moment, almost their first one alone together, must be devoted to impassioned caresses, Loraine rebuffed him.

He yielded finally with a smile to what he declared was her whim. Since she refused to give herself to happiness until various gray details were settled, let the details be settled swiftly! And then some sympathetic understanding of her dread, her abasement, being vouchsafed to him, he suddenly grew grave and tender and told her again, for the thousandth time, that she was the bravest and the best of women, that she was about to do the bravest, most loving, most high-minded thing in the world, that his need of her was su-



preme and that his reverence for her would never diminish. She could not hear him say it too often. Her wide eyes, half affrighted, wholly shadowed by solemnity, dissolved in happy mists at his assurances. For their case was so different from that of all the others in the world who had ever found it necessary to defy the world.

It was upon such talk as this that the doorbell suddenly pealed. Harrington's brow grew dark.

"I told that fool of a hallman not to let any one up here on any account," he said.

Sagi pattered into the dining room, the heavy dark-red velvet curtains falling close behind him.

"The honorable Mrs. Heath," he announced, with a questioning accent. "I say her honorable brother not at home. She say very well, it is her honorable pleasure to wait a little while. She in the library."

In his annoyance, Harrington Webster's face showed all those lines which the weeks of rejuvenating excitement had seemed to erase from it. He scowled and told Sagi that he would see his sister in the library, and that he, Sagi, could retire to his own quarters and remain there, no matter how many times the doorbell rang again. Then he crossed the room and kissed Loraine tenderly.

"This is the damndest nuisance!" he told her in a low tone. "But I'll get rid of Vivian in a few minutes. What whim took her— However, don't you worry. The library is two rooms off, and she need never—"

"Harry!" called a clear voice from the adjoining room. "Why did that Jap of yours—"

With a smothered exclamation, Harrington reached the door that separated the dining room from the apartment whence the clear, musical, impatient voice had proceeded. At least he would stay her progress there. Heavy velvet

curtains fell behind him, before Loraine had caught a glimpse of the figure on the other side.

"Why on earth didn't you telephone me, Vivian, if you were coming over? I have only three minutes to give you. I'm getting ready to go out. It's half past eight already, and I have an engagement at this moment. So hurry up with your tale of woe. What do you want? Has Jimmy cut down funds? I can let you have—"

"I don't want any money," the woman's voice interrupted. "Is any one in there?"

Loraine, frozen with terror and a shame that, considering what she planned to do, she admitted to be absurd, inferred that Vivian Heath's gesture had indicated the dining room out of which her brother had come; and she guessed also that he had denied the presence of any one in that room. For the voice went on:

"That's good. I'm glad you're alone. I'm sorry I've got to detain you from that important engagement of yours for a little while. But I have to. Harry, old boy, do you know what I'm doing? I'm quitting Jimmy. Give me a light, please."

"Quitting Jimmy!" Harrington Webster's voice in uttering those two words ran the whole gamut of incredulity and scorn. "Will you kindly tell me why you choose to make such an absurd statement?"

"It's not an absurd statement. It's the truth. I'm through with him. Why on earth you and the rest of the family ever let me marry that bounder—for that's what Jimmy Heath is, and you must all have known it—"

"Don't waste time in discussing Jimmy's characteristics. They haven't changed, I suppose, to any great extent during the past three months, or the past three years. If Jimmy is—what you call him—now, he's been that for the ten years you have managed to

rub along with him. What do you mean by talking of breaking over the traces at this stage of the game?"

"Can't you guess?" The woman's voice was strangely, sweetly blended of daring and fright and of something wistful and tender as she drawled the question.

Harrington swore.

"Do you mean to tell me you're taking one of your silly flirtations seriously?"

"I mean to tell you," she answered crisply, "that I've left Jimmy Heath's house to-night, and that I'm never going back there—never, never! And"—the tones softened, grew sweet and slow as golden honey—"as for the rest, you may put it that way if you want to. For I'm going away with Dan Bridges. I wanted you to know. You can break it to our mother and perhaps you can do something to quiet the newspapers when Jimmy finds out and makes his awful howl. Jimmy's roar is very loud when he is hurt; he lacks reticence." An amused contempt spoke now.

"Vivian, are you mad? Dan Bridges! Why, he's a boy! He must be at least seven years——"

"He's exactly six years and twenty-four days younger than I am," the woman's voice interrupted, level, incisive. "And he's brought back my youth to me—my youth, that I was cheated of. He's made me young again, and trustful and hopeful and gay. And I am going to give up living a hideous lie with Jimmy and——"

"For Heaven's sake, Vivian, don't talk like an erotic novel! Use your common sense. Use your knowledge of the world. I don't claim that Heath is an ideal husband, although there was keen enough competition for him when he was on the market. I know that he drinks, and——"

"You needn't recite the catalogue of his failings to me. I know them even

better than you. And I'm done with him, done, done, done!"

"But, after all, he doesn't bother you much. And he provides for you pretty handsomely. And since you don't care for him, it can't lacerate your feelings that he chases around after the Follies of 1920 or whatever the newest chorus attraction is."

"I confess," answered Vivian in that steady, carrying voice of hers, "that I might have jogged along with Jimmy forever as long as he didn't bother me, if it hadn't been for Dan." Again there was that break of words into music. Loraine, sitting in the dining room, overhearing every syllable, her hands like ice, her cheeks and eyes blazing, was moved by the poignant beauty of the tone in which the hidden woman spoke her lover's name. "But, you see, there is Dan, and that has cleared the situation for me. I'm not going to let this wonderful thing escape me. I'm going to be young and beloved and loving—I'm going to have it all, and not by back-stair methods, either. I tell you, I'm going to elope with him. To-night! All that I am asking of you is to see that the news is broken to mother as painlessly as possible. Ah, Harry, old boy, don't be cross! Wish me happiness! We both made an awful mess of matrimony, you and I. You should know how to sympathize with me."

"I'm sorry enough that your life with Heath hasn't been up to the storybook standard. But I'm everlastingly damned if I agree to let you make a complete fool of yourself!" He spoke savagely. "Are you utterly lacking in pride? Do you want to be an outcast, on the fringe of society, a *déclassée* woman? Even after Jimmy divorces you, and Dan Bridges marries you—provided he does marry you——"

"Harry!" breathed the anguished voice.

"Provided he does marry you," the man insisted ferociously. "Why should

he marry you? He can have you without! But, granted that he does, what sort of future will you have? You will be known, as long as people have memories, as a loose woman—a woman who could not exercise sufficient control over her silly emotions to keep from disgracing her family——”

“You talk as if family disgrace would be a new thing to the Websters,” Vivian interrupted him scornfully.

“It will be a new thing to the Websters to have one of their women disgrace them,” her brother shot back at her. “Good God, Vivian, you’re a woman thirty-one years old! You’re no silly, sentimental schoolgirl! You know how long these things last, like this affection of yours for Bridges—and more especially like his for you! Do you want the boy to wake up after a few months—after a year or two at the most—and find himself manacled, hand and foot, to a woman older than himself, a woman with a tarnished reputation, a woman with a past? Do you think he’ll care for that inheritance for his children—this young idealist of yours?”

“Are you a baby? Do you think you’ll be happy then? Do you think you’ll be happy when all the old tabby cats of society cold-shoulder you? Oh, I know how you despise them—but that’s because you’ve never been in their power. It’s a different thing when you’ve offered them the lash with which to whip you. You can’t be your mother’s daughter and intend this folly. Whatever else your mother is, she knows the world in which she lives.

“I’m not talking morals to you—I’m not interested in morals. I’m talking common sense. I’m telling you that you’ll have no position in society that would be endurable to you after you have committed this insanity. I’m telling you that Dan Bridges will not care for ostracism, even from the circles he most despises. I’m telling you you can’t

live on the shady outskirts of things and enjoy your life. I’m telling you that you owe something to your own family——”

He stopped suddenly. The listener on the other side of the heavy curtain had the impression that he came to a sudden realization of what he was saying. She herself seemed held to the spot by weights. She could not move. She could only sit there, cold and burning at the same time, and listen—listen—listen—to his voice. It had a curious quality in her ears; it was as if she heard it for the first time. Afterward, it came to her that this was true, and that she had indeed heard it, the real voice of the real man, the unaffected voice of the entire man, speaking for the very first time.

Powerfully as it worked upon her, it produced no change in the purpose of the woman on the other side of those velvet curtains. Vivian Heath concluded the interview, scornful, unimpressed.

“I’m sorry, old boy,” she said. “I had hoped that you would see my side of it and that you wouldn’t preach all that old-fashioned nonsense to me. It’s very funny, by the way—your preaching morality and decorum! But never mind! The devil can quote scriptures! Make it as easy for mother as you can, and don’t let Jimmy have too congenial and noisy a time in the newspapers. You’re all wrong, you know. The world has progressed ever so much since the days when they seated the Hester Prynnes in the stocks. After Jimmy gets his divorce, and Dan and I are married and come quietly slipping back to the world—oh, after quite a decent interval, I mean—you’ll find that everybody will be very glad to see us again. I’ve always amused them, and I’ll do it again! Good night, old man. I have kept you too long already from that engagement of yours.”

There were more sounds, sounds of

expostulation, of entreaty, of wrath, always retreating farther and farther away from the velvet curtains toward the distant door, and by and by there was the sound of that door slammed.

When he came back to the dining room, the weights had been lifted from Loraine's limbs. She was standing waiting for him. She was still a little dazed, but through her confusion one purpose ran clear. She wanted to get out of the apartment, out of the house, out of the sound of his voice. His face, white, haggard, excited, was the face of a stranger. He came toward her with his hands outstretched, but she waved him aside.

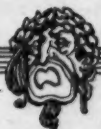
"I want my hat and coat," she said.

It seemed a ridiculously trivial thing to say, but it represented the sum of her desires. She didn't hear what he an-

swered, with what protestations, what denials, what assertions. She only heard herself repeating once more: "I want my hat and coat."

As a matter of fact, she was never able to tell afterward whether she said anything else before she left the place. She hoped, on the whole, that she had said something else—something kind, something pitiful, something understanding. But she never knew. She only knew that he had saved her from some terrible mistake, that his words to his sister had made plain to her something that had been in confusion. A wind had blown suddenly from the West and had cleared away a mist.

She hoped she had made him understand that she was grateful; but all she remembered was monotonously asking for her hat and coat.



### ONE KISS

THROUGH the dim years we may recall  
Tristan and Iseult's kiss;  
And that first moment—best of all—  
Of Abelard's wild bliss.

And Helen's holy moment when  
To one her lips she turned;  
Long, long within the breasts of men  
Its golden fire hath burned.

Kisses of love, when love first came—  
They shall outlast the grave.  
But oh, that deathless kiss of shame—  
The kiss that Judas gave!

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE.



# The Loveliest Lady

By Marie VanVorst

Author of "Big Tremaine," "Pichioni," etc.

GO down to the restaurant, Frieda, and tell the men to begin to unpack the Christmas tree and——"

"Ach, I cannod indo de resdorant go!"

"You *can't* go into the restaurant? And why not?"

"De waiters is all French."

"Nonsense, Frieda! You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Mrs. Caruthers exclaimed gently. "In a neutral country, with the sweet and holy Christmas feeling around you, to be so bitter!"

"Ach, it ain't me that ain'd got Grismus feelings."

"Nonsense, Frieda! Go down into the restaurant at once and tell the waiters——"

"Dey is French and Idalians, also. I dare nod go."

"If you just go down among them with the spirit of good will and peace and——"

"Ach, I don'd know how I gomes oud!"

Mrs. Caruthers, at her pretty writing desk, which, at a forced sale of rare furniture, she had bought in cheap at three thousand dollars, stopped writing thanks for Christmas presents. The rest of the room was in keeping with the desk, and Mrs. Caruthers, too, was in keeping, from the pearls about her lovely neck to the buckles on her morning shoes, whose price she was ashamed to tell. This charming little lady did not know how to balance values. Money and its power—what it meant, what it bought, what it could do

—had clouded everything else in the world. But down in a sweet and lovely nature, she pitied vaguely that class which goes by the name of poor.

She was domiciled for a few weeks in an apartment at the top of one of the big buildings on Park Avenue. After a trip around the world, during which her city house had been rented for a fabulous sum, she had returned to find that the tenants were still in it, and until they should be gone, Mrs. Caruthers had accepted the hospitality of a New York apartment.

It was Christmas time—Mrs. Caruthers's first Christmas in New York for three years. Some of its spirit had uplifted her, had actually picked her up and swayed her for a moment. A few weeks before, she had read over one or two of her father's old letters. She had loved this multi-multimillionaire father, who had made everything in the world possible for her, very much indeed. On one of these pages she had come across the following little paragraph:

I wish, my dear, that whenever you have a chance, you would do something for crippled children. Once, when I was a school-boy, I broke my leg, and I had to miss the Christmas fun. I have always felt sorry for crippled children ever since.

Downstairs in the restaurant of the apartment, Mrs. Caruthers was going to dress a Christmas tree and give a motion-picture exhibition for one hundred crippled children on Christmas Eve. It had been another of her little schemes to call in to help her in this Christmas charity a German charwoman who had done some work for



her in the apartment and for whom she had conceived a liking. She turned around from her little desk now and saw this woman standing in the door of her dressing room—a short, stubby Teuton, with no claim to any grace whatever, neatly, but poorly dressed, her gingham skirt well above her ungainly feet, her sparse hair drawn back tightly from her phlegmatic face.

"Heavens and earth, Frieda, what's the matter with your eye?"

The woman's lip trembled.

"How perfectly disgusting!"

"Ja," said the woman, "he is dot."

"I hope," said Mrs. Caruthers, "that you can do something about it before Christmas Eve. Paint it over, or something or other."

The woman furtively covered it with her hand.

"Go down in the restaurap and tell the men, Frieda——"

"I guess I ged my oder eye like dis," said the woman, "down dere."

"The packing boxes will have arrived," said Mrs. Caruthers. "There'll be five dozen sweaters and five dozen pairs of socks and five toys apiece for the hundred children and all sorts of presents for the Christmas tree, Frieda. Go downstairs and see that all these boxes are opened and that all those things are put on the floor. We can have the room for all afternoon. The waiters will help you." Mrs. Caruthers paused.

"*Mein Gott!*" said the woman. "Dey are French and Idalian. I gall on dem? Dey will drow me oud!"

Mrs. Caruthers had not been in New York more than a fortnight.

"Really, Frieda, you ought to be ashamed! You're ridiculous! There can't be any such feeling here in a neutral country."

"In de streds," said the woman, "dey gall me dirty Cherman. When I gome pasd de school——"

"Félice shall go down with you.

She's French and perfectly sweet, and they're all crazy about her, and just as soon as I can, I'll send down the butler. He's English, and he ought to be in the trenches now, but I can't spare him and I'm glad he isn't." She sat back and folded her pretty little hands. "I am absolutely counting on you for this. I have a sort of a feeling that you understand——"

What she wanted to say was "the very poor," because Frieda was very poor indeed, but what she said was "the cripples" and perhaps she felt that Frieda's eye put her in the dilapidated class.

"I will come down myself presently," said Mrs. Caruthers, turning back to her papers; "just as soon as some friends of mine come in to help me. They're skating now, but just as soon as they come in after lunch, we'll all come down to help you. And then," added Mrs. Caruthers, with her fascinating smile, "you are German, and Germans just love Christmas trees, and I'm sure you will have some romantic ideas, some German ideas, about dressing it."

Frieda turned with her hand still to her black eye and walked slowly out of the pretty room. She had very romantic ideas about Mrs. Caruthers, who had given her ten dollars as a present over her wages when she had seen how beautifully Frieda had cleaned her apartment and done her work, but she had no illusions whatsoever about her reception down in the restaurant, or about the Christmas spirit prevailing toward the Germans in this especial place.

She passed slowly into the kitchen, where two English menservants and a French maid were having something to eat and drink, according to their own taste, on the corner of a serving table. None of them looked at her. She slipped noiselessly by and, with a heart full of misgiving, went obediently

downstairs alone to the big restaurant, where on the floor lay a giant tree, still tied down by ropes, surrounded by half a dozen packing boxes from a big wholesale store on lower Broadway.

Frieda went up to the Christmas tree, kneeled down, and began to untie the ropes. She unfastened them all and stood swinging the branches, and then, without calling upon any one's help, she attempted to lift the big tree to its base alone.

As she was struggling with it, an Italian waiter, carrying a tray piled high with freshly washed knives and forks and silver, passed her. He put the tray down and came over toward the bent figure of the charwoman. In another moment, Frieda felt a man's hand helping her.

Frieda's knowledge of men was limited. She had drawn a great many conclusions and formed a little psychology, but it all began and ended with Herman and what he did under certain circumstances and what he did to her under every circumstance, and her standpoints of the war and current events were all based on Herman and what he thought.

The man in his shirt sleeves now helping her was the first enemy with whom she had come into anything like close contact.

"That's too big a job for a lady," said the man, who was a thin, sickly little fellow, unfit for anything except service as a waiter.

Frieda smiled at him with her heart in her throat.

"I guess I am more strong *als* you." She fell into her own tongue. "*Aber danke schön.*"

"All right, all right," said the Italian waiter, and together they got the tree on what went for its roots and put it upright in the middle of the room, where it shook out all its branches.

"Fine tree," said the Italian.

"*Wunder schön.*"

Then Frieda, still palpitating with her reception by this terrible enemy and her physical exertion, burst forth.

"Id's going do be a beaudiful Gristmus dree," she said, approaching him and still slightly covering her disfigured eye. "Mrs. Caruders, upstairs, is a beaudiful, rich lady, and she is going do give a beaudiful Gristmus do some lame childern down here."

The man nodded, displaying to Frieda two rows of milky-white and dazzling teeth. He had, in his miserable, delicate, and meager form, the good will and grace of his country:

"German," he said, "you?"

Frieda passed this by.

"She is a heavenly kind lady," she said, "and she wands do make de liddle lame childern happy, and I have god do unpack all dese boxes and dress de dree and find all de dings. Dey are goming ad four o'clock do-day—a hundred liddle lame childern."

"I am lame myself," said the waiter, "a little lame. That is why I am not fighting. Your people fighting?"

"No," said Frieda hurriedly, and then wondered, as she remembered last night, if she might be justified in saying that they were.

"All right," said the Italian. "I will get the hammer and the other boys. We all help."

He nodded and went out of the restaurant, and Frieda, without waiting for him, went feverishly over to the big packing boxes.

It was about eleven o'clock.

*Gott in Himmell!* Frieda Herman could never have told you how that morning passed, how the hours between eleven and two went. *Gott in Himmell!* Frieda Herman had lived thirty years, and she had never lived until that day. She was one woman, and there were eight men—French, Italian, one Irishman, and a colored boy. From the time that the Italian

reappeared with his colleagues until the last sweater was laid under the boughs of the Christmas tree and the last horse stuck his head from his stable of green, Frieda Herman was treated by the men who helped her like a lady and a queen. At least she thought so. There was not one insult to the Germans, one slur on her people; no one noticed her black eye—at least no one spoke of it. Together they worked like fairies to trim the Christmas tree. High up on the ladder, the little Italian stood, and one by one Frieda handed him the strings of shiny glass. Rope after rope of Christmas snow she placed herself on those fragrant boughs that called back to her the smell of the Christmas trees in her German home long, long ago.

A Frenchman, whose family, if they had but known it, had been scattered to the four winds by her people's invasion, helped her tie the popcorn and the candy bags to the boughs of green, and Frieda laughed with them and joked with them, at last set free from her terror, reassured, and, for the first time in her life, having what is known as "a ripping good time."

Mrs. Caruthers' French maid and the English butler did not make their appearance, and with the little corps of humble waiters, who, if they had any enmity, disguised it, she fulfilled the task she had been set, alone and well.

The last thing that Francesco put upon the tree was a Christmas angel, from whose hands fell the little banner: "Peace on Earth, Good Will toward Men."

It was two o'clock before Mrs. Caruthers, with five or six of her smart, gay, and pretty friends, came downstairs to dress the Christmas tree. They came into a deserted restaurant.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Caruthers. "Why, everything is all done!"

There stood the tree, shining, tastefully dressed, waiting to be lit, and

massed around beneath it were the presents for the children.

"What a shame!" exclaimed one of the women. "Why, I gave up everything to dress this tree!"

"Frieda has done it herself," said Mrs. Caruthers, in a tone almost aggrieved.

"Who's Frieda?"

"Why, the scrubwoman. I sent her down to unpack the things, and she has dressed the whole tree."

"She cannot have done it alone," said one of the girls.

"Some of the waiters must have helped her," said Mrs. Caruthers. "But no—it must have been John and Félice. But then how could it be, when Félice was dressing me and John was serving lunch?"

The doors of the restaurant were closed. There was not a sound.

"I will just go out there and see where Freida is," said Mrs. Caruthers, going toward the door leading to the kitchen. She pushed in the swinging door that led into a big butler's pantry, used for washing dishes. Beyond was a large kitchen. Half the door was of glass, and Mrs. Caruthers looked through it and stopped. Some eight waiters were seated around at an impromptu meal, and at the head of the table, with a glass of beer before her and evidently queen of a very friendly feast, was her charwoman, continuing her thoroughly good time.

Mrs. Caruthers came back to her friends.

"It is one of the prettiest trees I ever saw in my life," said one of the girls. "We couldn't have done it better ourselves."

"There, I told her so," said Mrs. Caruthers. "I said to her, 'If you will only go down with an air of good feeling and good will yourself, they will treat you well. There is no such feeling here in a neutral country.' She's in there having the time of her life

with the Italian and French waiters. Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"When are the children coming?"

"They will be here in about an hour," said Mrs. Caruthers, "and you will all stay and help me, won't you? We will have to pass the ice cream to them and put them in their places. There will be lots to do and everything to give out. Of course you will stay."

"I will stay as long as I can," said one of the girls. "You see, I have given up my whole morning."

"I will stay as long as I can," said one of the others, "but I have got to go back to the rink at four."

"Well," said Mrs. Caruthers, "I think we ought to place the chairs back there for the moving pictures, because the man is coming right downstairs with the machine and to hang up the sheets."

The little group went forward to the pile of chairs.

"I think I will just go and call Frieda and some of those men to help us. They must have finished eating by now."

Frieda Herman came out from the feast as far as the swinging door on the arm of Francesco. There she dropped it and came back into the room briskly, demurely, to continue to help. But she had forgotten to cover her disfiguring eye. This was Frieda Herman's great day. This Christmas—a day set right in the heart of the world's greatest war—was the day of her life. In it all the emotions were hers. Fear and dread and timidity had opened it. Physical pain and wretched treatment had seen its dawn break. She had escaped from her husband to go to work. There, other hands had awakened her; other hands had met hers with kindness, with friendliness; consideration for a woman such as she had never seen had been shown; and in mutual service for others, her heart had beat in sympathy with hearts in

which brotherhood still lived and triumphed over hate and enmity.

Frieda Herman was unconscious of any lesson learned, but the poor thing was happy. Side by side with some of the greatest ladies of the land, during the rest of the afternoon, Frieda helped. She and one of the prettiest and most charming women of society carried gently and tenderly down the stairs a little child whose feet would never touch the steps. Side by side she placed the children in their seats, adjusting their crippled limbs, putting footstools under legs that would never bend; and as she listened to their chatter and their laughter and watched them lift their delighted faces to the pictures on the screen, her own heart grew full and overflowed.

The ladies in their pretty clothes did not dazzle Frieda. That part of the quality was not new to her, nor was poverty new, but the thing that was had dazzled her down to her soul.

Together with the ladies, a little apart from them, of course, with the waiters in the background, she sat behind the children to see the tree spring into bloom, and as the blue and crimson and yellow lights shone among the green, the radiance seemed to Frieda to spring from her own heart. The murmur of pleasure and delight that ran through that little crippled group, the light that shone on those lifted faces—how beautiful it all was to the German woman! Here there was no hate. Here there was no cruelty, nothing at all but Christmas love. In her humble heart all the angels were around her. Mrs. Caruthers was heavenly kind; all the waiters were heavenly kind; and the sweet, poor, beautiful little children! It was a strange conglomerate heaven full of angels to her, and her swelling heart almost broke. In the background, dimly, was a tenement-house room on Second Avenue, dark, gloomy, with a horrible presence

there that meant only blows and drink, but she forgot it all in the glowing Christmas tree.

When Francesco appeared, carrying a tray full of plates of ice cream and cake, he came directly toward her, smiling, and Frieda, taking the plates from him, eagerly handed the sweets to the little children. It all unlocked her heart so, it was all touching her so deeply, that the words came to her lips more easily, perhaps, than ever before, and to each child, as she gave it its refreshment, Frieda said something, spoke some little murmured tender word.

Frieda Herman, in spite of the fact that there were many charming women there that day, must have passed among the cripples with some special grace. She must have passed so, because everywhere she went the little heads turned after her, wherever she was, delighted eyes followed her.

What was it? What did the children see? What was it that made their fascinated, delighted eyes turn from their toys, turn from their gifts, turn even from the pictures, to follow Frieda Herman in her short, ungainly dress, with her blackened eye? So it was.

Mrs. Caruthers and all her charming little group of friends and the waiters gathered together in the end to lift one by one, up the stairs to the busses wait-

ing for them, the helpless little children. But as Mrs. Caruthers passed one little boy, he caught her by the hand.

"Say," he whispered in his cautious little voice, "say, lady."

"Well, what is it?" asked Mrs. Caruthers, with great kindness. "What is it? What do you want?"

"Say, lady," he said, "some of us wants to kiss her."

"You want to kiss her?" asked Mrs. Caruthers. "You want to kiss whom, dear?"

The little boy could not stand, but he lifted up his little body as much as he could and pointed to Frieda, who was standing near in the light of the Christmas tree.

"Her," he said.

Mrs. Caruthers beckoned Frieda.

"Come here, Frieda."

The German woman came dutifully, and as she reached the place where her patron stood with the little boy at the end of the line, it seemed as if half a dozen children reached toward her, leaned toward her from their chairs, with their little hands raised, their little faces lifted, and Frieda heard, as she bent down, amazed:

"Say, we all want to kiss you, because you are the loveliest lady here."



MONEY talks, even if merely to say good-by.

LOVE is a beautiful plant, the root of which is friendship and the flower passion.

THEY are fortunate to whom success does not come before they have learned to be happy without it.





# STORIES OF THE SUPER-WOMEN

BY  
ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

What makes the super-woman? Is it beauty? Cleopatra and Rachel were homely. Is it daintiness? Marguerite de Valois washed her hands but twice a week. Is it wit? Pompadour and Du Barry were avowedly stupid in conversation. Is it youth? Diane de Poitiers and Ninon de l'Enclos were wildly adored at sixty. Is it the subtle quality of feminism? George Sand, who numbered her admirers by the score—poor Chopin in their foremost rank—was not only ugly, but disgustingly mannish. So was Semiramis. Here are the stories of super-women who conquered at will. Some of them smashed thrones; some were content with wholesale heart-smashing. Wherein lay their secret? Or rather, their secrets? For seldom did any two of them follow the same plan of campaign.

## Josephine Beauharnais, the Creole Empress

**S**ENTIMENTALISTS have called her a martyr saint. Cynics have called her a Machiavellian schemer. Both are wrong. She was just a fool—a languorous, selfish, morallless, stupid, untruthful, half-illiterate, good-natured fool—plus a nameless super-woman quality that raised her from the rank of colonial planter's daughter to the imperial throne of France.

She started life in a ramshackle sugar refinery on the island of Martinique. Her father's house had been blown down by a cyclone, and he was too poor or too lazy to build another, so he and his family lived in his refinery.

Her parents named her Rose—Rose Tascher de la Pagerie. Then her grandfather, Joseph Gaspard, came into a fortune; so, in honor of Joseph—and especially of his money—they wisely changed her name to Josephine.

She was the eldest of their three

daughters and the pet and disciple of her rich aunt, Marie Renaudin, a dissolute and crafty old adventuress. Thanks to this aunt, little Josephine was sent to as fine a school as Martinique afforded. That was all the good it did. The child flatly refused to study; she would learn nothing but music and dancing.

From babyhood, she was beautiful and her beauty drew provincial admirers to her in swarms. Her morals, even in these early days, were astonishingly negligible—and neglected.

Her first affair was with General Tercier, who was then an artillery subaltern stationed at the island garrison. Asked, in after years, for details of this youthful romance, Tercier smiled remisscently but would commit himself no deeper than to say:

"She was young, and so was I."

But the island gossips said more—much more.

Then into Josephine's heart wandered William de Kames, a local land agent's son. His family hustled William off to England. And although the young lovers vowed eternal fidelity, there is no record that they ever met again.

It was about this time that a strolling gypsy told little Josephine's fortune. And so odd a destiny did the seeress foretell for the Creole beauty that the fame of it soon spread all over the island. Here is a transcript of the prophecy:

*"You will marry early. Your marriage will be unhappy. Your husband will meet a violent death. You will be in dire peril. But will be rescued by the death of another man. You will marry a second husband. You will be sovereign of France."*

Every single detail in the forecast came true. If we had only Josephine's very unreliable word for it, the prophecy might well be classed with her large and interesting collection of lies. But the gypsy's words were common property through Martinique before any of them had time to come true.

Josephine married at sixteen. Her aunt arranged the match. The old Marquis de Beauharnais wanted a wife for his eldest son, Alexandre, Vicomte de Beauharnais. He had heard of the beauty of Josephine's younger sister, Marie, and he wrote asking her hand for Alexandre.

But before the marquis' letter could travel from France to Martinique, Marie had died of fever; so he suggested that the third daughter, Marcelle, would be as acceptable for Alexandre.

Here the aunt took a hand in the game and engineered the match for Josephine instead. The Beauharnais family seem to have heard something of Josephine's love affairs, and they looked askance at the match, but the aunt, by waiving the question of dowry and by other means best known to herself, at last carried the day for her favorite

niece. She herself later married the old marquis.

Josephine and her father sailed for France. And there, on December 13, 1779, the sixteen-year-old girl became Vicomtesse de Beauharnais.

Her young bridegroom had been lauded to her as a paragon of all the virtues and graces and accomplishments, and her expectations had run high. As a matter of fact, he was nothing to write home about. He was a dissipated weakling, with a reputation for foppish manners and general worthlessness. He was a dabbler in politics and a mediocre soldier, he having served under Rochambeau in the American Revolution.

A would-be dandy, he had the sternest contempt for his awkward and stupid colonial bride. He took no pains at all to mask this feeling, chivalrously comparing Josephine's drawing-room antics to a cow's. He hired tutors to educate her; she sulkily refused to learn. He complained bitterly that she "cared for nothing but frivolity and pretty clothes," and that she had no natural aptitude for either.

He lacked the wit to realize that his wife was not awkward, but merely undeveloped, and that a race horse makes a poor botch at plowing. In fact, he seems to have been the only man who knew Josephine without falling crazily in love with her.

But if Beauharnais was too stupid to admire his lovely bride, plenty of his friends had better sense. As she gradually emerged from shy, girlish gawkiness into glorious young womanhood, scores of French nobles vied for a place of worship at her shrine.

Her amours were discovered by her husband, who, in fury, set sail for Martinique to have an accounting with her family and to induce them to bring her to a better way of living.

The voyage was a failure. It was worse. For at the island, Alexandre

learned several startling details of Josephine's early love life—details that had hitherto been glossed over for his benefit.

His wife, with their son, Eugène, remained gayly in France during her husband's absence. On returning homeward, after this long separation, Alexandre was met with the news that Josephine had just become the mother of a little daughter—Hortense, afterward Queen of Holland and mother of Napoleon III.

Alexandre, on learning this, did some swift mental arithmetic; then went into a flaming rage that incited the following letter to his faithless spouse:

In spite of my soul's despair, in spite of the wrath that suffocates me, I shall contain myself. I shall tell you coldly that you are in my eyes the vilest of beings, that I know the full details of your intrigue with M. de B— [an officer in the Martinique regiment], with M. d'H., and so forth, that I am aware of the liaisons you have carried on and the people you have bribed to be discreet about them.

A creature who could listen to other men's love when she was already as good as affianced to me has no soul.

The letter went on to threaten immediate divorce, and concluded:

No tears, no protestations, if you please. You will persist in denial, because from your earliest years you have made falsehood a habit. But you will be none the less convinced, internally, that you are getting only what you deserve.

Josephine ran with this new trouble to her aunt, who was now living in France, and Alexandre was cajoled into dropping the idea of a divorce. Indeed, a sort of armed truce was patched up, and the couple once more lived, outwardly, as man and wife.

But her next intrigue—with De Rougemont, the rich banker—caused another breach. Alexandre and Josephine separated. Josephine fled to Martinique, ostensibly to visit her parents, but really to escape disgrace. At Havre, just before the sailing of the

Martinique ship, her son and De Rougemont's is said to have been born. I do not know whether or not this detail is true, or, if true, what became of the legally southpawed child.

Two years passed before she returned to France. And soon thereafter—the Revolution being then in full swing—Alexandre was arrested as a traitor to the new republic.

A few days later, Josephine herself was arrested as a "suspect" and was thrown into prison. She had been fearing just such a fate for herself, for the times were not propitious for aristocrats or for their wives. Through her newest lover, François Real, she had sought to gain safety. At his advice, too, she had tried to show herself a stanch republican by apprenticing her son Eugène to a carpenter and Hortense to a dressmaker.

But all these precautions did no good at all. Josephine was locked up in the prison of Les Carmes. It was a vile, pestilential hole, jammed with men and women of the overthrown nobility and with other political prisoners.

The mode of life that went on among the inmates of Les Carmes was as vile as the prison itself. Les Carmes was like heaven, in that it contained no "marrying or giving in marriage." But there all resemblance between the two places came to an abrupt end. The morals of the unfortunates were unspeakable. In the very shadow of death, these doomed captives carried on lurid love affairs in a shamelessly undisguised fashion.

Josephine, for example, chose the imprisoned General Hoche as a sweetheart, and Alexandre Beauharnais carried on an equally fervid intrigue with one Delphine Custine. The time for mutual jealousy and recriminations was past. Life, under the guillotine's dread shadow, was stripped to the bone, and despair led to vice, not to religion, so

far as these fated aristocrats were concerned.

Much has been written of the gay courage of the French nobles in Revolutionary prisons. But the foregoing true insight into the way they spent their last hours seldom finds its way into print. The prison guards, by the way—servants of the new "incorruptible" régime—reaped a golden harvest by conniving at such liaisons.

Among Josephine's adorers in the outside world was La Bussiere, a former actor whom the Revolutionary shake-up had tossed into the Convention and into membership in the Tribunal. The *dossier* of Josephine's case found its way to his hands, among other papers. It was written on a single thin sheet.

La Bussiere promptly chewed it to pulp and swallowed it. In the rush of indictments, it was a long time before a new *dossier* could be prepared, and her case never came to trial.

The prisons were jammed to the doors—especially Les Carmes. It was needful to thin out the crowd faster than could be done by the regular processes of law. A batch of captives were accused of a plot to escape and were summarily hustled to the guillotine. Alexandre Beauharnais was one of those victims.

"Good-by, dear friend," he scribbled to Josephine, as he waited his turn to climb into the tumbrel. "You know whom I love—my two children. Be their guide. Prolong my life in their hearts."

Barras—a natural-born poker player, as regards strenuous bluffing on a meager hand—often visited the prison. He had fallen in love with Josephine. He yearned to save the scared, nerve-racked beauty. So did his fellow politician, Tallien, who was also more or less enamored of her and who was tremendously in love with Madame Fon-

tenay, another captive whom later he married.

But both these rising politicians were powerless. Both—and all France—were under the sway of a fanatic statesman, Maximilien Robespierre by name. Robespierre, just then, was the moving spirit of the Reign of Terror that kept the prisons so full and the guillotines so busy. The rest of the French were glutted with bloodshed and weary of the ceaseless slaughter. But Robespierre's appetite for carnage was insatiable, and he kept the Terror alive.

Barras and Tallien—more for love of Josephine, it is believed, than from any general idea of mercy—headed an anti-Robespierre clique in the Convention, and bit by bit began to undermine the dictator's power. With Robespierre dead, the Reign of Terror would come to an immediate end. And at last they overthrew him and sent him, snarling and raving like a rabid beast, to the guillotine.

Josephine's trial, so runs the story, was set for July 10th. On July 9th, Robespierre fell. The tidings of his execution reached Les Carmes in quaint fashion:

A woman came running along the street from the direction of the Convention. Halting outside the prison, she screamed until the captives crowded to the windows.

The distance was too great for her words to reach her listeners. So she pointed to her dress—*robe*—and then picked up a stone—*Pierre*. After which she made a gesture—hideously familiar in those grim days—of passing her forefinger rapidly across her throat.

A howl of delight burst from the thronged windows. Josephine Beauharnais collapsed to the stone floor in a faint.

There was a general jail delivery throughout France. Josephine was free; so was Madame de Fontenay. The triumphant Tallien married the

latter. Barras did not bother to marry the former, but she became the acknowledged queen of the mixed salon he maintained for his fellow politicians, and their wives—and brevet wives.

Abominable as had been the life of the aristocrats in the old day, frankly indecent as their lives had been in prison, the highest society in the lofty-idealized new republican France more than matched them for rottenness. And Josephine Beauharnais was a blazing star in this murky lurid social firmament. Here is a word picture of her:

"From the chestnut hair that rippled over her small, proudly poised head to the arch of her tiny, dainty feet, made for homage and kisses, she was 'all glorious without.' Witchery was in every part of her—in the rich color that mantled her cheeks, the sweet brown eyes that looked out between long-fringed eyelids, the small, delicate nose, with its nostrils quivering at the least emotion. The exquisite lines of the tall, supple figure were instinct with grace in every movement. Above all, her voice was seductive music, every note of which was a caress."

In spite of these attractions, she fairly lathered her face with powder, grease paint, and rouge. Arnault adds his tribute to her character, in the word picture:

"Her even temper, the gentleness of her disposition, the kindness that animated her looks and was expressed, not merely in her language, but in the very tone of her voice, her natural Creole indolence, which showed itself in her attitudes as well as in her movements, and which she did not entirely lose even when exerting herself to render a service—all this gave her a charm that counterbalanced the vivid beauty of her two rivals, Madame Tallien and Madame Récamier."

Truly, Josephine had traveled far since the days when her late and unlamented husband had sneered at her

shy dullness and had likened her awkwardness to a cow's! Yes, and the Martinique gypsy's prophecy was fulfilling itself in the most approved manner: "You will marry early. Your marriage will be unhappy. Your husband will meet a violent death. You will be in dire peril, but will be rescued by the death of another man."

All this had come true. There remained only the verifying of the forecast's two final clauses:

"You will marry a second husband. You will be sovereign of France."

Meantime, Josephine, though in more or less splendor, was leading a life of which a gutter woman would not have been proud, and very steadily her early-ripe beauty was beginning to fade. She was growing old; at least old for a professional beauty who comes from the tropics and has undergone much. Also, she was woefully extravagant.

Barras' heart and Barras' pocketbook began to weary. And once more luck was with him—even as it had been when first he won the Creole beauty and when he overthrew Robespierre and later when—by the aforesaid quality of bluff—he had made himself "director" and virtual ruler of France. Now his run of luck found him a way to rid himself of the aging Josephine.

A boyish Corsican had come to Paris some few years earlier, without a job, without a penny, without prospects, in short, with no assets but a good military training and boundless military genius. He was a glum, harsh-voiced, harsher-souled starveling, who, to the end of his days, spoke French with a strong Italian accent. Finding no employment in the army, he had tried his hand at writing, had failed, had planned to gain employment under the Sultan of Turkey, had failed again, and was at the end of his hope and his rope.

Then the Revolution tossed him upward, made him a general at twenty-five, and won him the patronage of the



all-powerful Barras. The Corsican adventurer called himself Nabuleone Buonaparte. You know him as Napoleon Bonaparte.

As part of the government's policy, Napoleon restored to a slain aristocrat's son his dead father's sword. The aristocrat's widow—Josephine Beauharnais—came to thank Napoleon in person. And at sight of her only slightly faded loveliness, he fell wildly and all-consumingly in love with her.

He greeted her with a supremely awkward bow that all but sent him sprawling on his face. Josephine's natural lazy kindness alone enabled her to choke back her laughter. She could scarce believe that this undersized, gawky, pallid, big-headed youth was the far-famed General Bonaparte. But Napoleon was dazedly in love. He said afterward:

"She was as beautiful as a dream!"

Thus began a whirlwind courtship—Napoleon's first serious love affair, perhaps Josephine's hundredth.

"Your Corsican is so funny!" she told Barras.

"He has a future," returned Barras, "and he wants to marry you. It is your best chance."

So much Barras admits in his Memoirs. And Josephine, stupid as she was, saw the point; the more so when he promised to give Napoleon, as a wedding present, the supreme command of the Army of Italy.

The Army of Italy was hungry, ragged, ill trained, worse equipped, in subordinate. It did not look like a very wondrous wedding gift. Yet that Italian command was Napoleon's first real step toward world power and the first move in Barras' own overthrow.

Josephine accepted Napoleon's proposal. Napoleon was in a delirium of delight. He behaved like a cross between a cave man and a lovesick high-school boy. He may or may not have known Barras' rôle in his fiancée's

heart drama, but every one else did. The following extract from a letter written by Barras, not long after the wedding, shows in what tender regard the director held the woman of whom he had just gotten rid by the gift of a barren Italian commandership to her bridegroom:

Madame Bonaparte was reputed to have influence with me. Some contend that she has been my mistress. What is certain is that she has been the mistress, in sight of the whole world, of General Hoche, and that Hoche repudiated the idea that he would divorce his wife for her, saying that a man might take such a woman as his mistress, but would not necessarily make her his lawful wife.

Napoleon looked at such things differently. He was thrillingly elated at the chance to make Josephine his wife and the partner of his rising fortunes. They were duly married, both lying, under oath, about their ages, in order to bridge some of the disparity of years between the boy general and his middle-aged bride.

A few days later, Napoleon set out for Italy, there to knock his ragamuffin army into shape and with it to smash every foe that opposed him. He wrote wildly ardent love letters to his new wife during this first Italian campaign. Here is a sample of them:

Come to me! Come to me! You have done more than steal away my soul. You are the one thought of my life. I say my prayers before your portrait. When I am tempted to curse fate, I put my hand over my heart and find your portrait there. As I gaze on it, I am filled with deathless joy. Life holds for me no anguish except separation from my adored wife. Your tears set my blood on fire.

There is something grievously pathetic, I think, in this mad outpouring of a world conqueror's love for a woman who laughed at him and despised him, and who understood his greatness no more than a guinea hen could understand an eagle's. There is no reason to believe that, at any time in

Josephine's life, she loved him. There are countless proofs that she did not. Had she loved him—had he found one shred of happiness in home and in family life—the map of Europe and the history of the world might to-day be different. Any fool of a woman can tear down more than an army corps of masculine geniuses can rebuild.

Napoleon, as soon as he took up headquarters in Italy, began to write more and more urgent pleas to Josephine to join him there. But she was having a very good time where she was, and she had no intention of leaving the joys of Paris for any garrison town.

As the wife of France's new hero and victor, she found herself courted and honored and made much of at every turn. Hers was the place of honor at every state banquet. Barras and she apparently had not troubled to sever their relation because of the marriage. Tallien, too, wooed ardently the wife of the man who was conquering all of Europe for France.

Also, Hyppolite Charles, handsomest soldier in the army and aid to General Leclerc, had just become her avowed worshiper, and she was singling him out from the horde for special attentions.

All France rang with Napoleon's name. All France fêted Napoleon's wife.

Josephine naturally did not care to give up this novel sensation of being society's center, instead of—as before—society's dubious hanger-on. When her husband's demands waxed too pressing, she easily found a lie to excuse herself from the unwelcome journey. This lie she cheerfully scrawled to him, and it more than served her turn. There was no more talk, for a time, about her going to Italy. To her falsehood, Napoleon replied, by special courier:

A child as sweet as its mother! Oh, that I could be with you at this time!

But there was no child; there was no prospect of a child, then or ever. And at last Josephine was forced to leave Paris for the hated trip to her husband's headquarters at Milan.

There she was received with regal honors. Men who wished to use her influence with her all-powerful husband sent her heaps of rich gifts. More astute statesmen bribed her with a salary of one thousand dollars a day to "pump" Napoleon for military and political secrets and to sell these secrets to her generous employers. She thriftily consented to this pretty bargain.

Back to Paris came the couple, and presently Napoleon set off on his disastrous Egyptian campaign. Josephine flatly refused to go to Egypt with him, and once more she escaped by means of the same lie that had served to delay her journey to Italy.

The moment her husband's back was turned, she gave herself up entirely to the bliss of her affair with Hyppolite Charles, casting over for Charles all her other adorers.

For once, too, she had all the clothes she wanted. Not that Napoleon's salary or income paid for them—he was still poor—but as his wife, her credit was boundless. Her wardrobe was more like a well-stocked department store than the outfit of any one woman. For instance, among the cheaper items of this list were more than two hundred summer dresses of percale and organdie. Her debts, at this time, were about four hundred thousand dollars, of which three hundred and forty thousand dollars was owed to tradesmen. She was very happy indeed.

Then came the exposure.

Napoleon heard of her affair with Charles. Through his two brothers, Joseph and Lucien, left behind in France, he received full proof of Josephine's guilt. He demanded that certain of his marshals tell him what they knew about her. They told.

Dropping everything, Napoleon left Egypt and went posthaste to Paris, with a fine Corsican resolve to kill or divorce his faithless wife and to slay all her lovers—notably Hyppolite Charles.

Josephine set out to meet her husband, seeking to win him back by her wonder charm. But she took the wrong road and missed him.

Napoleon got back to Paris to find his house closed and his wife gone. Only pausing to order Charles arrested and consigned to La Force Prison, he locked himself into his own house.

Josephine, scared half to death, came back from her fruitless quest. Napoleon would not let her in. She wept. He remained unmoved. She sent for her children, Hortense and Eugène, whom he loved as his own. They also wept. The servants wept. Everybody wept—except Napoleon.

Then, suddenly, he cut short the idiotic siege by opening the door and telling Josephine to come in and stop playing the fool. He had, in a day, changed his whole point of view toward her, seeing her at last in her true light and realizing that such a woman is not worth the wrecking of a grown man's career. And his attitude toward her underwent a complete and permanent change.

He let her live on as his wife. He freed Charles from prison. He took no revenge on her other lovers. He even found the cash to pay her enormous debts and gave her money for new extravagances. Nor did he ever again show the faintest jealousy toward her or seek to restrict her flirtations.

You see, his love for her was dead. And so wholly was it replaced by indifference that he no longer cared what she did. It was not even worth while to hold rancor against her for deceiving him.

"The eagle does not catch flies!" was an oft-quoted proverb in those days. And Napoleon was above declaring war

on a stupid and middle-aged dame who had not had the sense to stay true to him. Instead, he turned to other women for consolation. And—queerly enough, since she never loved him—Josephine was tearfully and complainingly jealous of these women. Perhaps, after all, he took the surest and deadliest of all revenges against her.

Josephine was growing old. She spent three hours every morning in the hands of massage experts and hairdressers and other beauty restorers. But it was no use. She had bloomed too early. She could no longer keep Father Time from pawing impudently at her face.

Her skin was sallowing and showing wrinkles. Her teeth were beginning to decay and to turn black. Her beauty had been all of the body and not at all of the mind—she had no mind—and as the body aged, the beauty waned. Now was the time for soul and wit and intellect to illumine and transfigure the fading face, but, possessing none of those qualities, she could not summon them to her aid.

Napoleon was first consul—then sole consul—then emperor. His own hand placed the imperial crown on Josephine's empty head. She was empress of the French—wife of Europe's foremost potentate, but her glory had departed. She was a puppet.

Europe was treated to the sight of a brand-new, hand-made emperor and empress—a brand-new court, a brand-new aristocracy.

The emperor was the son of a Corsican law clerk and a village housewife. The empress was the daughter of a colonial planter, and had been in jail. The new nobility was made up of such dignitaries as the Duke and Duchess of Dantzig, former workingman and washerwoman, Prince Murat, ex-tavern waiter, and scores of other mushroom aristocrats who had come from stable, from kitchen, from plow.

Not content with this, Napoleon created kingdoms and put his own relatives and followers on their thrones. Murat became King of Naples; he was Napoleon's brother-in-law and is said to have been one of Josephine's lovers. Jerome—whom Napoleon had divorced from Elizabeth Patterson of Baltimore and married to a German princess—was made King of Westphalia. Eugène Beauharnais, former carpenter, was a duke and Viceroy of Italy. And so down the line.

Europe had turned up its nose at any nobility that did not date back at least to the Crusades. Now it gasped in dismay. But a wholesome fear of Napoleon crushed any laughter out of the gasp.

The moment Napoleon fell, his court and his self-made aristocracy and his puppet kings and his jerry-built kingdoms collapsed. No hybrid or mongrel race, science has proven, will endure without artificial aid, but will die out or revert at once to type. Witness the domestic mule and the half-breed Indian.

Josephine was a gracious, if witless, hostess in an ungracious and clever court circle. In spite of her defects, she filled her figurehead position of empress and filled it creditably. But, even as Napoleon had outgrown her, so he presently grew into the need of replacing her.

He had formed a mighty dynasty. To perpetuate that dynasty, there must be an heir to the throne. He and Josephine had no children. So, in very businesslike fashion, he divorced Josephine and married the daughter of the Austrian emperor—Marie Louise, a girl of eighteen.

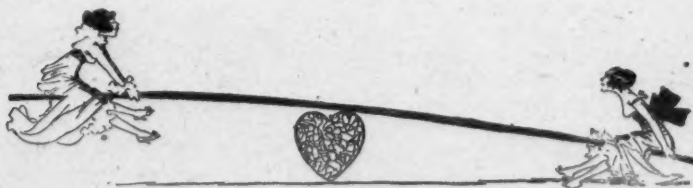
He gave Josephine a pension and the palace at Malmaison. He often went to call on her at Malmaison, and once even sent his little son, by Marie Louise, to see her.

When he was overthrown by the Allies, and his dynasty was in ruins, Josephine placidly arranged to pay a state visit to congratulate his lucky rival and successor, King Louis XVIII. of France. She also entertained his conquerors—the Russian czar, the King of Prussia, Wellington, and the rest—at Malmaison. Which shows how deeply she mourned her former husband's fall.

Josephine died just before Napoleon's return from Elba, and oceans of maudlin, sentimental, sob-sister stuff has been written about her ever since.

I have no hope that this story of mine—or the authentic records from which it is taken—can alter the popular idea of her in any way.

The February number of AINSLEE'S will contain the next article in Mr. Terhune's super-women series: "Fanny Ellsler, the Dancer Who Kicked a Dynasty to Bits."



PLATONIC affection: The correspondent's version of an ordinary love affair.



## Painter Bill and the Christmas Bronc

By William H. Hamby

Author of "The Sound of the Hammer,"  
"The Springs of Youth," etc.

IT is hard to tell just why we do anything. Usually the reason we give to ourselves is not the right one at all.

Painter Bill thought he had come to New Orleans to escape the cold. Although it was very early in December, around his shack far up in the Northwest the snow was drifted four feet deep, and several times the thermometer had kicked the center out of zero.

"Oh, this is something like!"

Bill drew an easy-chair in front of an open window in his large, delightful room at the St. Charles, and looked out at the soft, twinkling night. The south wind that came in was balmy and sweet as a breath of spring; and carried the fragrance of roses. The throngs on the street below still wore the light white clothes of summer. And from a distant boat, a calliope was calling merry-makers to the nightly excursion on the river.

"Good old New Orleans," said Bill pensively. "I'm glad I'm back. Give me roses and radishes in preference to blizzards and bunions every time."

Of course that might have been the reason why Bill came back to the "City Which Care Forgot" after wandering over the face of the earth for twenty-eight years. But more likely it was the call of the blood. His grandfather had lived and died in New Orleans; at least

he had sailed from there just before he had died. A Federal gunboat had overhauled his shipload of contraband just outside the mouth of the river, and a Federal cannon ball had taken the captain amidship. But, most likely of all, it was the telepathic call of "Cremo"—the incomparable broncho—that drew the wanderer South.

While Painter Bill reveled in the fragrant night wind and waited for Henry Devaux, whom he had met on the river front, to come to take him to dinner at one of the obscure French eating places, there was a rap on the door.

It was neither Henry nor a bell hop, but the assistant clerk of the hotel. It must be a matter of importance.

"There is a lady in the Italian Garden who wishes to speak to you," said the clerk.

Painter Bill was nonplused, flustered. He had not known many ladies in his life. He was more at home with Indians.

"I guess you are mistaken in the room," said Bill. "This is No. 208."

The clerk referred to a card and shook his head.

"That is what she said."

"I don't know her," said Bill.

He still wore his Western clothes—for necessary, if unobvious, reasons.

The clerk smiled good-humoredly.

"I'll introduce you."



The clerk led Bill through a fairly dining room, aglitter with lights and silver and beauty, to a table apart by a window, where sat a fashionably attired young woman, and announced with a bow:

"This is the gentleman, Miss Marlin."

She graciously indicated that he was to take the chair facing her.

"You are——" She was the sort of a woman to whom it comes hard to say "Bill."

He nodded.

"Yes, I'm Painter Bill. But"—he was the one embarrassed for a moment, then an illuminating smile covered his tanned face and lighted his mild blue eyes—"to be sinfully frank, I can't remember where I have met you."

"You never have," she replied. "It was by the merest accident I learned you were here—and, having a little business message, sent for you."

"Yesterday I was in the candy store on Canal Street mailing a bale of pecan candy to a little cousin of mine—Dorothy Allison. The clerk remarked, as I gave her the address: 'That's funny. The gentleman that left as you came in was sending candy to the same girl.' And to-day I got a letter from the little cousin's father—Mr. Allison, of St. Paul—urging me to look you up. He had just learned you were here."

"Oh." Painter Bill drew a deep breath of relief. He hated puzzles. "Shake!"

He reached his long brown hand across the table and—much to Miss Marlin's embarrassment—shook her hand most vigorously.

"Dorothy's the dearest little chap that ever wore shoe leather," said Bill enthusiastically. "We got acquainted last winter, when she and her father got marooned in a blizzard right close to my shack. 'Brittle Bob,' my partner, and I saw the automobile coming

when the blizzard struck. By hanging on to the fence, we found them and got them out not any too soon. They stayed with us three days. After they were gone, I painted Dorothy's picture as she looked playing Indian in my blankets."

"That," Miss Marlin said, "was why I wished to see you. Mr. Allison, passing your place a few days ago, stopped in to see you, and Brittle Bob"—she smiled this time—"showed him the picture. He asked me to find you and offer you five hundred dollars for it."

Painter Bill started to let out a whoop, but remembered in time. He did reach across the table and upset a glass of water in shaking hands with the girl again. In spite of her embarrassment at the attention they were attracting, her spirits kindled at the sight of so much enthusiasm. It was very seldom she saw any one really enjoy anything.

"That is the biggest piece of luck ever happened to me—and some good luck has come my way!" Bill was fairly bubbling. "Now, I can do it—that is, if what I hear is so."

"I hope it is." She was flushed with the pleasure of his pleasure. "Whatever it is—ought to be so for your sake."

## II.

Painter Bill left the lady uncereimoniously and charged down to the hotel lobby, where he sent a telegram to Brittle Bob that cost him two dollars and thirty cents.

The gist of the message was for Bob to get that picture to J. M. Allison in a whoop and send the five hundred dollars to the St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans.

Henry Devaux found him at the telegraph desk, and they went out to find the obscure French restaurant

that served five courses of meat in a fifty-cent dinner.

Devaux was, of course, French—son of a Canadian farmer, living on Bayou St. John. Henry was a sort of half pirate, half fisherman. He owned a house boat that ran two or three miles an hour when the engine was working, in which he fished and hunted up and down the river.

"Say"—Painter Bill leaned over and gripped Henry's arm—"know anything about a dog-and-pony show that's up the river somewhere—'Bartell's Dog and Pony Show?'"

Henry nodded. He had black hair, so thick and close to the scalp that it seemed glued to the bone, and a hard, sloping forehead.

"They are up at Pardi now," said Henry. "Show there all this week. They have winter quarters on Lake Pontchartrain."

"Well, isn't that luck?" Bill pounded the table explosively. "Nobody ever had as much good luck in their lives as I've had in one week! When are you going up that way, Henry?"

"Day after to-morrow," replied the Frenchman.

"You have a passenger," said Bill. "Load in an extra can of gasoline and charge it to me."

Twice the next day, in passing through the hotel lobby, Bill saw Miss Marlin, and once almost flattered himself into believing that she meant to speak to him, but she did not. He wished she would. She was the most interesting person he had ever seen.

About seven, he came down from his room and left the key at the desk. As he turned toward the St. Charles Street entrance, he saw Miss Marlin again, sitting alone in a corner of the lobby.

She looked lonesome—looked tired of things.

"Apparently nothing exciting has happened to her in a long time,"

thought Bill, and he instinctively felt sorry for her.

"Good evening." He stood before her, hat in hand.

Unmistakably her expression quickened into interest. She was glad to see him.

"Why, how do you do?" She nodded and smiled. "I see you are still happy over your good luck."

"Been happy all day," said Bill. "Wakened up several times last night to think about it. Nobody ever had so much luck as I have. Not," he added ruefully, "that it is all good. But some sort of luck is happening to me all the time—and it's all interesting."

She looked at him steadily, her eyes smiling, but her lips quivered faintly.

"I wish I could say that! Nothing ever happens to me—and none of it is interesting."

"Something happened just now."

Bill smiled winningly. He really was sorry for her. It must be awful to be so rich or so exclusive that nothing ever happened to you.

"What?" she asked.

"I came to ask you to go to the park with me."

If the invitation to go to the park with a crude, strange man dashed her for a second, her embarrassment was quickly gone. She was on her feet in an instant, two spots of color in her cheeks.

"I'd love to go."

They took a street car. It was lucky he did not think of a taxicab. Bill had only forty-eight dollars between him and the bread line—and he was paying five dollars a day for a room at one of the best hotels in America. His grandfather had used to stay at the old St. Charles in the days of his affluence—back in the forties. It was counted the best hotel in the world.

They stood on one of the little arched bridges over the lagoon in the park.

A crescent moon was tangled in the branches of a big live oak. The smell of flowers was still in the air, the grass was green.

"It seems just like spring—and it's nearly Christmas." Bill drew a deep breath. "My, I'm glad I'm not back up in the snow, where you have to thaw chunks of ice out of the heels of your shoes every morning before you can get them on."

She had noticed with a grateful sense of relief his innate fineness, his instinctive courtesy. And the touch of beauty that he gave to tree or moon or water with just a word here and there had stirred her.

"You spoke," she said, "of things being interesting. Have they always been? Don't you tire sometimes of people and things?"

He looked at her in surprise and shook his head.

"Why, no, of course not. Do you know"—he spoke reminiscently, looking down at the reflection of a tree in the still water—"I've been everywhere—England, France, Austria, Japan, most of the time in the Rockies. I've been a sailor, a cowboy, a student, a painter. I've always lived on the margin of things. Not on the ragged edge—just the margin; sort of lived along the outskirts enjoying the things richer folks pass by. Sometimes I've been flush, and often broke. But there never has been a time when I didn't watch the sun set with a big feeling, nor when I wasn't glad to feel the wind on my face. And just now, with that quivering light out there—and the green grass—and the flowers here in December—why, I'm just so full of thrills, life is plumb good to me!"

She laughed a quivering, yearning laugh with tears back of it.

"I love to hear you say that! I love at least to be near some one to whom the simple things of life seem good."

"They are good," he said positively, "and beautiful!"

Without noticing it, she moved nearer him, so that the white, soft sleeve on her arm touched his coat.

"You spoke," she said, "about this five hundred dollars for your picture of the little girl as being such wonderful luck. Do you need—"

"Oh, yes"—he broke into her pause with the answer—"of course I need money. And that was the greatest luck I ever had. You see, I'm going to buy a Christmas present with it for my partner."

She waited a moment for him to continue, then laughed curiously.

"Well, I'm listening."

"Sure it don't bore you? Well, did you ever see anybody that just naturally put such store by something that it was like pulling joy out by the roots to take it from them? Brittle Bob is like that. Bob is my partner. He's a sort of cowboy. I have a shack up in the Northwest where I've been painting Indians and things. Had a little luck that way—not much, but enough to keep the coroner away."

"Well, Bob lives with me—and stands by me through thick and thin. We call him 'Brittle Bob' because his hair is so curly it looks like it would break if you touch it. Bob just naturally loves horses. He loves any horse, but he loved one in particular—a yellow broncho called 'Cremo.' Bob trained Cremo until he could do all sorts of tricks—bow and shake hands and dance and buck—to order."

"A fellow offered Bob and Cremo a job in a circus. They took it for a year. Then Bob had some bad luck. It wouldn't have mattered for him—he'd have starved right cheerful—but he couldn't feed Cremo. So he sold him to a circus fellow for three hundred dollars."

"Ever since then, Bob's been a changed man. He sits around the shack

and sings the mournfulest songs—"Oh, Bury Me Not On the Lone Prai-ree," and things like that. He never could get money to buy him back. But he has kept track of Cremo, off and on, and rode once two hundred miles to see that bronc, and it nearly broke my heart to see 'em together.

"He's always inquiring from fellows who have been to the circus, and if he should ever hear that Cremo is being abused, I wouldn't give three cents for the fellow's countenance that did it. No, I don't believe I'd bid one cent on it."

Painter Bill had his hat on the rail; the little young moon shone on his thick, fine hair, and he rubbed his cheek speculatively with his right hand and laughed in a gleeful, warming way.

"That's why I'm so tickled over that five hundred. I heard that Cremo is with a dog-and-pony show up the river. I'm going up in the morning in a house boat with a Frenchman and bargain for him. I'm going to give that bronc to Brittle Bob for a Christmas present."

### III.

Henry Devaux's erratic gasoline engine kicked itself into silence three times in five miles. Painter Bill was so anxious to get to Bartell's show and see if Cremo really was there that he left the house boat and walked the last six miles.

Bartell was an ugly brute on his best days, and this was not one of them. About the only way to get a decent reply from him was to hit him with a tent pin, and as Painter Bill approached in the friendly manner of a gentleman and a trader, Bartell damned him for interrupting his abuse of a roustabout.

The showman, had Cremo all right—Cremo looking thin and shaggy and woebegone—but he had no notion of selling him. He might take a thousand dollars. Bill kept his tone to a

friendly, soothing register and tried to bring down the price. While they discussed the matter, Cremo made a false move of some sort, and Bartell slugged him in the ear with the butt end of a whip and kicked him in the ribs.

Painter Bill was no fighter, but Cremo was a friend of a friend, and he gave the brute at least one surprise on his left jaw. But after Bartell had regained his balance, Bill lasted only a trifle over seven seconds.

Having whipped his visitor, Bartell felt a little more generous, and offered to sell Cremo for five hundred and fifty—the very last nickel he would cut.

When Bill painfully crept up to his room that night—he dodged the elevator—he was about the most woebegone soldier of good spirits that ever cashed in on bad luck. He was thinking a good deal about Cremo's abuse and the brute Bartell, and considerable about his own bruises. But mostly he was going over and over the question: "Where'll I get the extra fifty?"

Before he went to sleep, he counted over all the things he ever had had that would sell for fifty dollars and found none of them left—nothing that would sell for even twenty dollars.

"Poverty," he grumbled, "is a delightful estate, but the taxes on it are durned hard to raise."

There was nothing—unless— He happened to think of "Moon in the Face," the portrait of an old Indian chief that he had painted and kept for friendship's sake. It was a good picture. Bill was a real painter; not only did he have the artistic soul, and the real color of the West, but he had had excellent training those two years in Paris before his father had died. Yet he had never been able quite to catch on. He had no way to get a vogue, and no money to get a studio.

"I've always had to chase twenty dollars so hard," he said, "I never had time to make a hundred."

But who would buy "Moon in the Face?" He thought of Miss Marlin, but instantly threw that thought out. Not for a broncho's ransom would he ask her, for she might buy it as an accommodation.

The next morning he thought of the manager of the hotel and went to him with the Indian portrait.

"Good morning," Miss Marlin arose from a settee and held out her hand, as he came across the lobby. "You look as if more good luck had been showered upon you." She smiled brightly.

"There has," nodded the painter with a sort of dancing exuberance back of his eyes. "I tried to sell the hotel one picture and they bought two."

Bill was doubly hilarious over the hundred dollars, for it not only pieced out the broncho's ransom, but gave him enough for another Christmas present, and he was thinking much of a second Christmas present these days.

They went out together, and when Miss Marlin discovered sympathetically that he was lame and his left arm bruised, he explained.

"Henry's gasoline engine kicked me and I fell against the scrupper or whatever the seven sharpest corners are called."

She laughed deliciously.

"Nothing matters with you when your spirits are soaring."

"No," he said. "And this morning! Did you ever see anything richer than the sunshine on that magnolia tree? And it's nearly Christmas."

She laughed again, and the hand that rested lightly on his arm tightened a little.

"Really, you make me like them, too," she said seriously.

One evening they came in from a trip around the docks where the commerce of all parts of the world passes, a singularly interesting sight to both of them.

"I hope that letter is here," said Bill, as they entered the hotel. For over a week he had been watching every mail for the check for the picture. "Here it is," he said exuberantly as the clerk handed him a letter. "It's from Brittle Bob."

They sat down together in a corner of the lobby.

"Don't luck come my way?" said Bill. "Now here it is nearly Christmas—to-morrow is Christmas Eve—and this check gets here just in time." He still held the letter unopened.

"Do you know?"—her eyes warmed and her face filled with color—"I'm going to enjoy Christmas, too, this year—the first time in a long, long time. It's so much fun to see you having a good time."

He tore open the letter—and looked twice in the envelope for the check, then glanced down to see if he had dropped it. Then he hurriedly read Brittle Bob's scrawl. His fingers shut on the letter, mashing it into a wad, and his eyes looked absently at the clock over the clerk's head.

The girl felt a cramp around her heart; her throat was thick and choking; something smarted in her eyes. The light had gone out of his happy, buoyant face—a dull gray hurt was there instead. She saw him a light-hearted wanderer on the face of the earth, without ties or kin or fortune, but always loving the day and trusting to his luck, always giving and always believing. He really had been down a hundred times, but had never known it. Fortune had never been very kind to him, and yet he loved the sunset and the feel of the wind and believed in the next person he met and wanted all of them to get what they wanted.

"Now," she said to herself, and the salty sting slipped from her eyes down her cheeks, "he's lost again—and his Christmas is spoiled."



"Excuse me," he said firmly, trying hard to look casual. "I've got to go up to my room a little while."

She watched him go and wondered if his gallant spirit would rise again in the morning.

"Too bad," she thought, "that those so cheerful of fate should be so cruelly used, while those richly blessed should be——" She thought of her own discontent with a deep sense of shame.

When she called for her key, she, too, had a letter, which she read still standing by the desk. Then she hurried to the elevator.

In his room, Painter Bill sat stretched in the leather chair, utterly, utterly miserable. He smoothed out the creases of Brittle Bob's letter and read it again. Like all of, Bob's letters, it had neither beginning nor end:

Bill, I got a tail of woe to tell you. I started with that picture on single-foot Sally to that there goop that was to pay you money for it. On the way I met black Jim Davis whose been sojournin down in them parts. He's tellin me he saw Cremo in a show down there; and that the feller has bin abusin that bronc shameful. As I rid on I got to thinkin about it, and I got so mad I got to tellin myself how when I caught up with him I'd smash his head. And I'll be durned, Bill, if I didn't forgit myself and smash that there picture of yourn over the saddle horn. I shure done it proper—there warn't nough left of it to make a picture postal card. I reckon though you can paint another——

He crumpled up the letter and threw it at the waste-paper basket.

"I reckon," said Bill despondently, "that Luck, after all, is a stepmother, and she ain't much in love with the other woman's family."

And then there was a hurried knock on his door.

#### IV.

Painter Bill, sunk in the depths of despondency, merely yelled:

"Come in."

As no one entered, he got up and opened the door.

It was Miss Marlin, with a letter in her hand, obviously excited.

"Is that you?" She held out a type-written letter to him.

DEAR LOUISE: I wish you would see William Ordway Kingston at once and tell him to repaint that picture of Dorothy from memory. We must have it. I'll raise the price to seven hundred and fifty dollars.

A Merry Christmas to you from all of us.  
J. M. ALLISON.

Bill's spirits flared up a moment, then the disappointment settled into lines around his mild blue eyes.

"But it will be too late for Christmas," he said mournfully. "And I'd planned such a good Christmas."

"What I want to know is," said Miss Marlin, "is that your name? Funny I never asked nor you ever told me your full name."

"Yes," nodded Bill indifferently. "That's it. None of it but the first syllable was popular in the West, so I just sloughed it off."

"Come down to the next floor right away," the girl said urgently. "Wait for me in the corridor by the elevator."

She left quickly, and he obeyed, wondering what she wanted.

"Come in here," she said, leading the way to a seat in a parlor by an open window. She held some papers in her hands. "You told me your grandfather used to live here." She was looking at him with keen, eager interest, as if hoping the answer would be right. "Was his name P. Ordway Kingston?"

Bill nodded, wondering what she was getting at.

"He was a sea captain and owned a line of ships?"

"Half interest in them," replied Bill. "The Civil War finished him. Sent him and all his ships to the bottom of the sea."

"No," said Miss Marlin, light dancing in her eyes. "It did not. Not quite. Your grandfather's partner was Burton T. Marlin, and he was my grand-

father. They had nine ships. Eight were captured or sunk. But one—my grandfather's ship—got away to France with a load of cotton. He stayed in France and grew very rich. Here is a letter he sent my father before he died."

Bill's heart was thumping more excitedly than had he been trying to paint a wild grizzly, as he read:

DEAR SON: The ship *Crescent City*, with which I escaped to France, was owned jointly by me and P. Ordway Kingston. I learn with great regret he was killed while attempting to run the blockade. But he had a son—Benjamin. I tried for years to locate him, finally traced him to France, and learned both he and his wife had died here. They had one son—William Ordway Kingston, of whom I have found no trace.

I sold the *Crescent City* in 1866 for forty thousand dollars, and made a profit of twenty thousand dollars on her cargo. Half of this—thirty thousand dollars—belongs to old P. Ordway's grandson. If he can ever be found, I request that this amount be paid from the estate I leave you.

"Well?"

The girl's face was flushed, her hands moving in her lap as she watched Painter Bill closely.

He did not move for a moment; then drew a big, deep breath and ran the back of his hand across his eyes.

"This ain't April Fool instead of Christmas, is it?" he asked with a slow smile.

"No, indeed!" She was so happy that she unconsciously put her hand on his arm. "It's really so, Painter Bill. Haven't you said that something always is happening to you? It's good this time. That money has been in New York banks thirty years, drawing interest."

He rose and stalked up and down the corridor a little while, then came back looking fierce and breathing hard.

"Say, now, this ain't some rotten scheme of yours to give me this money?"

"Oh—no—no indeed!" she protested

vehemently. "It is real as real can be. Father advertised in the papers for you off and on for years and years. I can show you some of the advertisements."

That convinced him, and with a sudden whoop that almost brought the house detectives, he grabbed both her hands.

"Say, girl, if that is so—if I've got all that money in New York—can you lend me seven hundred until I can get to it?"

"Most delightedly," she said.

Laughing, she jumped up and hastened down to the desk. In a few moments, she returned with seven hundred dollars in currency.

"Thanks awfully," he said, smiling, and without stopping for the elevator, he went down the stairs two at a time to the lobby.

"Here"—he pushed a blank before the telegraph girl—"write down this message and send it quicker than scats:

"BRITTLIE BOB, *North Star*, Wyoming.

"Found Cremona. Am buying him for your Christmas present. Will start him by express Christmas morning. Good luck.

P. B."

And being too happy to sleep, Bill went out down to the river and hired a gasoline boat to take him upstream to the landing nearest Bartell's Dog and Pony Show.

It was Christmas Eve, a beautiful, balmy day, with the gayety of the holiday mixed with the greenness and fragrance of spring.

Miss Marlin had been in a quiver of joyful uncertainty all day. She had gone in and out of the hotel, watching the happy holiday faces; searching the crowds for one particular jubilant face. When Bill did not appear, she telephoned several times to his room.

Dusk came. He was still away. The happy expectancy in her face became

a little worried. She felt a bit of disappointment. The best Christmas Eve since the world began was losing something. It was slipping away and he was not here.

Then she saw him—tall and brown and radiant—coming through the lobby. And as she sprang up and went toward him, no one could have said that her face looked as if nothing interesting had happened in a long, long time.

They were on the twinkling streets, jostling the other merry jostlers, looking into the holiday windows.

"You know," said Bill, taking her arm as he piloted her through the rushing traffic, "I've got old Bob fixed. But I've got another present to buy. I've spent four solid hours and I can't decide on a thing. Nothing seems exactly good enough for her."

"Oh, it's a *her!*" she said teasingly, and gave his hand a little pressure with her arm. "What is she like?"

"She is like you," he answered, "exactly like you. And say"—a happy idea came to him—"I'm going to let you pick out your own present."

"Oh, it—is I?" She tried to be surprised. "How lovely! Well, I'll accept the commission. Let's start here and look at every window until I find what I want most of all."

They found very beautiful things, but nothing they could settle on. They gave up stopping at all the stores, and soon had passed out of the shopping district, scarcely noticing it.

"Isn't it wonderful?"

The moon was full, the night as soft as a northern May, and the fragrance of flowers was on the Christmas air.

"It seems like a dream night," he said. They had long passed from the clamor of the trading center.

"Why, here is Audubon Park!" she exclaimed. "Do you know how far we have come?"

"It hasn't seemed farther than down a garden path," he said.

They sat in the deep shadow of a big live oak. And then he remembered the Christmas present.

"I've given up the search for the Christmas present," she said directly. "Anyway, you have already given me the greatest of all Christmas presents—a love for life that makes everyday things interesting. If you must give me another present, you can decide. Anything will be lovely."

"May I give you what I'd rather give you than anything else in the world?"

"Yes."

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright." She nodded.

"Then"—he smiled as he bent down—"hold still—and don't squeal."

As they entered the lobby, her hand still rested on his arm.

"This is the very best Christmas I ever had," she said in a low, happy undertone, and her lighted eyes and flushed face confirmed it.

"It's the greatest day since——"

"Painter Bill! Painter Bill!" a call boy sang out.

It was a telegram from Brittle Bob, collect, and Bill, after a hurried reading, handed it to the girl.

Hurrah. Hold Cremo. I'm coming to ride home with the bronc and see the durned express company don't starve him. Keep track of that blamed coyote of a showman until I get there. I want his address sure and certain.

"Isn't this a good old world?" Bill was looking into the face of the girl, happy as he. "I feel so Christmasy I could almost love my enemies."

"Can't you really love them?" She looked up at him, twinkling.

Bill ran his hand over his left jaw, remembering Bartell, the showman.

"Well," he said reflectively, "I think I can—after Brittle Bob has been with him about eleven minutes."

## THE CREATION OF WOMAN

(From a Hindu Legend)

By DANIEL E. WHEELER

Now, when Twashtri, the Creator,  
Came to making of the human,  
Lo, he used all in his man child,  
Leaving nothing for the woman;  
Yea, his elements and spirit  
To his son were freely given,  
But his daughter? Long he pondered,  
Then to subtlety was driven.

So he took the moon's rotundness,  
And the curves of vine and creeper,  
And the clinging of the tendrils—  
In these witcheries did steep her;  
Took the trembling of the grasses  
When the wind their gladness cowers;  
Slenderness of reeds in springtime  
And the bloom of virgin flowers  
Were then taken by the Master;  
And he used the leaves' own lightness  
For her footsteps and her fingers  
And her ever-tremulous brightness.

From the elephant was borrowed  
Tapering of trunk; while glances  
Of the deer were given woman  
For her loving darts and lances;  
Clustering of bees, brown golden,  
Taken for her eyes down sweeping,  
But the gayety of sunbeams  
Added, with the clouds' soft weeping.  
Then the fickleness of breezes  
And timidity of rabbits  
Were bestowed upon this creature  
Made of such conflicting habits.

Twashtri filched from parrot bosoms  
Softness for his fairest being,  
But from adamant drew hardness—  
Qualities past all agreeing.  
Warmth of fire, cold of snowdrift,  
Yielded up their bane and blessing,  
And the chattering of blue jays  
Gave to her a trait distressing;  
Took the vanity of peacocks  
And the sweetness of new honey  
And the cruelty of tigers;  
Blent in her the fierce and sunny.

Then did Twashtri, the Creator,  
Give this paradox in keeping  
Of his man child, who was lonely,  
For his waking, for his sleeping,  
For his pain beyond all measure,  
For his joy above all treasure.



# Market Value

By May Edginton

Author of "The Woman Who Broke the Rule," "He That Is Without Sin," etc.



THE little tawny man mounted the last flight of stone stairs to the offices on the third floor, for as he had been calling in at every office all the way up, he did not want to irritate the lift attendant by ringing for him afresh on each landing. Looking about him on the third-floor, the little tawny man picked out the name plate that seemed most promising for his purpose and entered, through the door marked "Inquiries," the office of Edward Harker, shipping agent.

The office boy stopped eating chestnuts, regarded the green shade that had tempered the original black of the visitor's overcoat, scorned at a glance the crack that came near a split in one of his brown boots, and said to him:

"Yes? What ju want?"

The caller replied in a tired, but determined voice:

"To see Mr. Harker himself, please."

"What's your name?"

"No name."

At this the managing clerk was fetched, and when he had likewise summed up the caller, said:

"You couldn't possibly see Mr. Harker."

"I must see him," replied the little tawny man.

"For one thing," said the managing clerk coldly, "he's out."

"Then I'll wait," said the visitor.

"What's it about, anyway?" asked the managing clerk.

"Private business," replied the little man.

"Important?"

"Very, *ve-ry* important."

The managing clerk went softly into some inner sanctum, some guarded shrine, and returned again.

"Go through," said he.

The visitor went through a tiny anteroom, where a female typist sat eating peppermints, into a little splendid apartment garnished with old oak, Turkey carpet, armchairs, and a fine fire, before which Mr. Edward Harker stood, a little overstout, a little overfed, remarkably well-tailored, with his patent-leathered feet wide apart and his hands in his trousers pockets. He saw a shabby man, not greatly under forty, perhaps, about five feet five in height, and giving an impression of being all red and tawny.

"G'day," said Mr. Edward Harker. "Well, what can I do for you?"

"I need five pounds," replied his visitor.

"Ah," said Mr. Edward Harker. "Then it's out of my line. We don't do that sort of thing."

"Can I sit down?" asked the little man.

"Two minutes," replied Mr. Harker,



pulling out his watch, "if you'll change the subject."

The big man remained standing, and the little man seated himself in one of the spacious armchairs.

"It's the twenty-third of December," he remarked.

"And a damned expensive day of the month, too," said Mr. Harker unpromisingly.

"If you will kindly hear me out, sir," replied the visitor, beginning to recite the speech he had made, with little variation, in almost every office in the building, "it will be the quickest way to get rid of me or to come to an opposite decision. I'm not begging. I come to offer my services in any capacity from now until nighttime to-morrow—Christmas Eve—for the sum of five pounds."

"Five pounds a day," mused Mr. Edward Harker, staring. "Ratio, thirty pounds a week. Do you really put thirty pounds a week as your market value?"

Setting aside this question very quietly:

"I put no restriction whatever on the service to be rendered you," resumed the little man. "All I want is to earn the sum I mention by to-morrow evening. The fact is, sir, I'm out of a job temporarily. The old one—four pounds a week, sir—was up yesterday, and I don't step into my new one till January the first. And, owing to unexpected calls, I've had to spend all my ready money."

"All that's very nice, I'm sure," said Mr. Edward Harker, waving a hand, "but not to the point, is it? In fact, I'm afraid I can't put anything at all in your way at present."

Stubbornness overtook the little man and settled all over his insignificant person.

"*Nothing* you'd like done? *No* trick you want played? Somewhere or other

there must be a man wanting some one to do a dirty job."

Mr. Harker stared.

"S'posing I asked you to burgle the British Museum and bring me a mummy as a souvenir?"

Mr. Harker laughed. The little man did not laugh. Looking redder, tawnier, and inexpressibly stubborn, he was prepared for the challenge.

"I'd do it."

Quite suddenly, the shipping agent became serious. The little man relaxed in his chair with a quick sense of relief in the promising pause.

It was perhaps ten minutes before Mr. Edward Harker spoke again. During that interval, he had handed his visitor a cigar from an opulent box and taken one himself. Turning his back on the room and its other occupant, he stared from the window into the little quiet alleyway beyond which the Strand roared. His eyes, at first cogitative, became full of laughter; his neck swelled a little and grew red; his lips twitched on his cigar; his hands jingled money or keys in his trousers pockets.

Presently he turned and looked at the little red-and-tawny man. A fine portentousness, a huge secrecy, informed Mr. Edward Harker. Abruptly he moved back to the fire and took up his old position on the hearthrug, with his patent-leather boots planted well apart.

"I have a job"—again he paused—"a job for the right man, but—"

The little red-and-tawny man grinned a grin that creased up his face almost to the obscuring of his eyes and tapped his chest.

"Yes, there you are," answered Mr. Harker. "I see that."

"You would have to put aside your private morals—if you have any—in my interests," he added.

"Rather say, I'll serve you blind," interpolated the little tawny man.

"What's your name?"

"Does it matter?"

"No," said Mr. Harker, "since you won't get the five pounds till you've earned it. Now, sir, follow what I'm going to tell you. This business—which was a pretty good concern—was left to me wholly, as I thought, by my father. After enjoying the very considerable fruits of it for over a dozen years, I am faced with what would be, to me, comparative catastrophe. I am told that I shall have to halve this concern unconditionally with another.

"A cousin of mine has turned up an agreement—which he alleges he found among hitherto unexamined papers belonging to his late father—which purports to be signed by my father in settlement of some old family debt, allotting to this cousin, his nephew, one-half share in this business at my father's death.

"You will appreciate that such a document, turning up at the end of all these years, during which I've become accustomed to doing myself and my family well, is something of a knock in the eye. Eh, sir? My cousin, who is a miserly, crooked-tempered sort of fellow, intends to fight me. Now, of course, if I could only get hold of that agreement——"

Mr. Edward Harker smoked meditatively during the ensuing silence.

He became aware that his nondescript visitor was by now taking notes in a businesslike fashion, in rapid shorthand and with an earnest air of nice discrimination in selecting points worthy of recording. As the bland voice stopped, he looked up, pencil stump poised, and waited; then inquired:

"Name and address of this gentleman?"

"Of my cousin?" said Mr. Harker musingly. "Naturally his surname would be the same as my own, since the relationship is on the paternal side. As to his address, he lives in the

suburbs—The Elms, Highway, Upper Wadham. Are you thinking of visiting the house?"

The visitor nodded.

"He is alone to-night," said Mr. Harker, staring up at the ceiling. "His family have left town for Christmas, and he is to join them to-morrow, I believe. There's just a cook person left to look after him, but she's elderly—and deaf."

The little red-and-tawny man took a mental inventory of Mr. Harker's physical effects as if for comparison.

"About how big would your cousin be, sir? As big as yourself?"

Mr. Edward Harker smiled suavely.

"He's much my figure. A little older, a bit of a freak, perhaps—but should you meet, you may notice a family likeness."

The red-and-tawny man rose and put away his worn notebook.

"Good day, sir. I shall be looking in to-morrow."

"So?" said Mr. Harker suavely.

"Well, good day. Er—by the way, have you learned jujutsu?"

"Unfortunately no, sir."

"Can you shoot?"

"No, sir."

A curious shade of some feeling, one would have said of relief, flickered into the shipping agent's face and was gone.

"I cannot tell you," he added, "where my cousin keeps this document."

"It doesn't matter," said the little man.

"One moment," said Mr. Harker, as the other laid his hand on the door-knob. "There is just one thing to say to you. Should you fail, are you prepared to take the consequences?"

"Any consequences," said the little man. "It is all or nothing with me now."

Mr. Harker nodded as if with satisfaction.

"You wouldn't feel inclined to give me away to exculpate yourself?"

The little man, with a wry face, explained:

"I agreed to throw over my morals on this job, but there's a kind of thieves' morals I'll keep. Honor between you and me, sir."

A great astonishment dawned in Mr. Edward Harker's eyes, as, big, bland, and well fed, he watched the other's exit. Then he touched his bell.

"If that person calls to-morrow, let him straight in."

The red-and-tawny man walked down the many flights of stone stairs very slowly, while he thought. Out into the sharp air, into the pulsating street, he went, still thinking. He wandered and stood about for some time, entered an A. B. C. shop, and ate a humble meal, with tea, to occupy more time, and finally, as the result of all this thinking, set off at a brisk pace to a firm of cheap stationers and printers at Ludgate Circus.

He wished to see their book of sample business and visiting cards with a view to having a supply engraved for himself.

Not wishing to occupy space at the thronged counters, this customer moved a little aside to examine this book of samples, and he had turned over several pages before one arrested his eye:

Messrs. Abbott & Abbott,  
Solicitors.

14a, Bourne Street, W. C.

The little man smiled slightly, flicked over the leaf, closed the book, handed it again across the counter to a busy attendant, and left the shop. Outside, he transferred to his pocket case the card of Messrs. Abbott & Abbott, solicitors, of Bourne Street.

Like Mr. Edward Harker, he put a hand in his trousers pocket and jingled the money there, but not from mere idleness of habit. He felt three big

coins that he knew only too well were not half crowns, and two slightly smaller ones that he knew were not florins. Fourpence remained for the red-and-tawny man to spend upon the pursuit of his own pleasures for the rest of the day.

Darkness had now come down upon London, and all her lamps defied it gloriously, and all about the shabby little man throngs of shoppers hurried. Every one was shopping, from men hurrying home from shops and offices to grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

As if the sight put grim heart into him, he squared his shoulders and said to himself:

"I'll take my time and walk."

To walk to Upper Wadham from Ludgate Circus takes at least two hours of a man's time, and Mr. Edward Harker's late visitor filled three hours making his very leisurely way to that prosperous suburb.

It was nine o'clock when he reached the outskirts, nine-thirty when he had crossed the common that, a lonely constable had informed him, lay between him and the Highway, and close on ten when, prowling up and down a new road, endeavoring to read the names of the houses by the insufficient light of sparsely placed lamps, he at last marked down the detached and spacious residence called The Elms.

The red-and-tawny man did not hesitate before swinging open one of the big gates of the half-circular drive and walking crisply in. A splendid moon and stars sailed overhead, and he took a look at them that might have been a last look as he pressed his thumb on the bell. He found his lips and tongue quite dry and his spine cold. He thought the bell shrilled through the house like a burglar alarm.

When no one answered his first summons, he had fairly to insist upon his reluctant thumb's pressing the bell

again; shuffling footsteps responded to that second call, the door was opened a few inches, and the head of a female servant—an elderly head of unwilling appearance, as if its owner knew herself to be out of her sphere in doing this unaccustomed doorwork—looked through the grudging aperture at the man who stood on the steps.

"You want Mr. Harker?" she asked.

Remembering that this must be the alleged deaf cook, he nodded as he answered:

"If you please, at once. On most important business."

"Your name, please?"

With a quiet air of assurance, he produced the business card of Messrs. Abbott & Abbott, and she allowed him into the hall while she carried the card to her master. It was a rich hall, very comfortable, with a fire burning in it, and the little red-and-tawny man looked around him with a wondering admiration, a touch of bitterness, and a humble envy. He must have known that, here, he looked more like an impoverished tradesman, or perhaps a seedy cadger, than any more considerable class of man.

Except that he passed his tongue round his lips once or twice, a looker-on could not have guessed if fear lay in him, or cunning, or murder, so mute and stubborn and expressionless he was.

The cook returned and motioned him into a room on the right. The little man, treading firmly in her wake, had the impression of an apartment as luxurious as the hall, but lighted only in subdued patches by the reading lamp that stood on a table at the elbow of the master of the house, who lay back at ease in a morocco-covered chair, with an evening paper in his hands. As this very late caller entered, he looked up through a pair of smoked spectacles, and his dark eyebrows rose into arches above them as he waited in a rude and

interrogatory silence very damping to enterprise.

The little red-and-tawny man looked back at him mildly, but sturdily, and bowed, hat and lumpy-headed stick in hand. He saw Mr. Edward Harker's cousin to be indeed a man of much the same build as the rich shipping agent, in a comfortable padded smoking jacket. His feet were in carpet slippers; his hair had not the same spruce appearance, and was brushed anyhow or nohow; his mustache, instead of having a smart upward twirl, hung ragged and streaky about his mouth. As for the general trend of his features, they might, indeed, have borne some resemblance to his cousin's had they been in normal shape, but the fact that he was absolutely toothless had caused his cheeks to fall in and his nose and chin to approach each other in a manner not arranged by nature. He looked many years older than his cousin Edward.

He spoke first, after a few moments, in an indistinct, negative kind of voice.

"Well, sir, to what am I indebted for this untimely visit?"

The little man noted that the business card of Messrs. Abbott & Abbott lay in the circle of light under the reading lamp upon the table.

"I represent Messrs. Abbott & Abbott, sir."

"That," replied the unprepossessing person in the chair, "does not concern me."

Then the red-and-tawny man smiled and spoke with a quiet glibness, one hand holding his hat and the lumpy-headed stick; the other resting on a near-by chair back.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Harker—I presume I am addressing Mr. Harker? Thank you—but it concerns you intimately. Your cousin, Mr. Edward Harker, has placed a certain matter, a lamentable matter of a family dispute, in our hands."

"Why? You are not his regular solicitors."

The pause that ensued was almost negligible before the visitor ran glibly on.

"That, sir, is a matter we really cannot pass any opinion on. All that concerns us is that we have been intrusted by Mr. Edward Harker with the business of disproving your claim to a half share of his father's estate. We understand that you possess a document relating to such provision, which purports to be signed by the late Mr. Harker, and I am here to discuss it with you, our client's wish being, from a creditable family feeling, to settle with your claim amicably and privately. If you will, therefore, sir, permit me to glance at this alleged agreement——"

The smoked glasses were fixed in the speaker's direction like huge eyes fastening on his soul, and their owner put a question sharply.

"Why do Abbott & Abbott choose such an hour for your call?"

The red-and-tawny man was ready.

"Well, sir, I am to express our apologies, but Mr. Edward Harker is responsible for that. We have been in a great rush of business before the Christmas break, and late this afternoon he came round and said he wished particularly for the matter to be broached before he leaves town to join his family in the country."

The other did not change the focus of the smoked glasses, but he nodded slowly, as if satisfied.

"I think, sir," the visitor continued with a nicely genial politeness, "that you will have no objection to this very ordinary and reasonable request of ours."

After some thought, the elderly cousin of Edward Harker agreed. He rose shufflingly in his carpet slippers and crossed the room to a bureau. He unlocked a drawer, with a most proper

appearance of caution, and drew out a long envelope.

Behind him the little man in his shabby overcoat seated himself on the near-by chair and stilled the sudden gasp in his breath. His hand gripped his hat brim convulsively. His heart felt so hot and his spine so cold that he felt like a fever embodied and packed in ice.

"There you are, my good sir," said the elderly Harker patronizingly in his mumbling voice, as he returned to his chair and sat down again in a fat, slothful manner, as if he hated to part from its comfort.

The little man bent forward with a stolid face to examine the agreement spread beneath the reading lamp by Harker, who did not take his hands off the booty for an instant. It was written on a sheet of foolscap that looked old and creased and that was dated some fifteen years back.

It was, indubitably, signed by Edward Harker, now deceased.

"Can you let me have this to show my firm? We would return it to you to-morrow."

Two dark eyebrows made derisive arches above the smoked glasses, and a laugh rumbled up from somewhere beneath the padded smoking jacket.

"Do you think it likely, my good sir?"

"Not at all," replied the little man, and sat back, smiling.

Already Harker was refolding the treasure, preparatory to its entry into the long envelope.

"Well," said he, with a blandness curiously like his cousin's, "you've seen it, and I presume that you need not encroach any longer upon what is usually my hour of solitude and comfort. Good night to you."

The little man checked the other's hand upon the bell.

"Don't trouble your servant, sir. When I go, I can let myself out. I



am afraid I want to trespass a good deal longer upon your time, if you are willing to discuss——"

The other reached out his hand suddenly to the spirit tantalus and siphon that had been placed upon the table. The little man thought, simultaneously: "Yes, does himself well, this bloke does."

Something of flinty rage smoldered behind the mask of his imperturbable face.

"Perfectly willing to discuss anything, my good sir. But first, let me give you a whisky and soda——"

"No, thanks, sir."

"You prefer brandy?"

"Nothing, thanks, sir."

"A liqueur? Just a cherry brandy, then, to begin with?"

The little man became poignantly aware that another cluster of bottles, little ones, beautifully and variably colored, lurked behind the tantalus.

"Nothing, thanks."

"You don't drink?"

"Sometimes, Mr. Harker, when my business day is done."

"Ah! Well, there are some deals, you know, in which a little mutual conviviality isn't half a bad thing."

"Just so, sir."

"You think this isn't one of them?"

"Perhaps not, sir."

The flicker of a grin stole to Harker's prematurely aged face. He became silent; then said suddenly:

"After all, it wouldn't matter if I had left you this," touching the long envelope, "for I have a duplicate."

The red-and-tawny man opposite concealed his start of chagrin by dropping his hat and picking it up again.

"I don't keep that here," Harker continued more communicatively. "A friend takes care of that for me. I'm a cautious man—a very, very cautious man, you may tell your firm."

If his hearer felt baffled, beaten, or furious at this new twist in the adven-

ture, no trace of it showed on his somber red face. He bustled to unbutton his overcoat, to get at a breast pocket. He wetted a finger vulgarly to flick over the leaves of his notebook.

"Could you give me the gentleman's name and address, sir, purely for reference? We may have to have it by and by."

With the smoked glasses once more focused on his interlocutor's face, Harker gave it.

"Mr. George Robin, The Laurels, Highway, Upper Wadham—a near neighbor, you see."

"Thank you, sir."

"I think I am going to make a proposition to you," said Harker slyly. "I dare say a handsome little sum of money wouldn't come to you unappreciated any more than it does to myself, for instance. Now, you must give me your word that whatever passes between us from now on the subject of this agreement is quite confidential."

"Ab-so-lute-ly confidential," said the little man.

"I am going to offer you—you personally—a hundred pounds to dissociate yourself from Edward on this job, to come over to me in a way I shall suggest to you, which no one need ever guess——"

"It wouldn't be any use," said the little man, as placidly as before. "I am here for one thing and one only."

"You can afford to despise a hundred pounds?"

"Not at all."

"Change your mind and let me explain——"

The little man seemed to consider.

"Very well, sir."

Harker rose shufflingly.

"I'll just put the agreement safely away," he remarked, looking at the other as if to observe the effect of the words, "and then we'll talk."

He went over ponderously to the bureau, and pulled open the drawer

from which the bunch of keys still hung. Light as a child, quick as a kitten, the red-and-tawny man was after him, lump-headed stick poised. The blow came from the back, neatly behind Harker's right temple, over the ear, and felled him like some mute, unresisting ox.

The little man bent over the prone figure, wiped the sweat from his brow with the back of a hand, gave a little, half-hysterical moan, and proceeded to the work of gagging and binding. He left the victim laid out straight, with his head on a cushion, possessed himself once more of Messrs. Abbott & Abbott's so-efficient business card and the agreement from the drawer, switched off the light, and went out into the hall, shutting the door behind him.

He crossed straight to the telephone, which he had noticed on his entry, opened the telephone address book, and found Mr. George Robin's number.

He rang him up and soon was speaking with Harker's friend and neighbor.

"That Mr. Robin himself? I'm Mr. Harker's solicitor, and I'm speaking from The Elms. Mr. Harker himself is in bed with one of those shocking sudden colds. Yes, came on after his return from business; he says. He wants you, if you'll be so good, to send or bring round that document he left with you, immediately if possible. I have to leave directly, and I'm to take it away with me. Thank you very much, sir."

The little man stood by the now dying embers of the hall fire and shivered. He crackled the momentous long envelope absently between finger and thumb, and put the card away again carefully in his pocket case. He looked at the lump-headed stick with amazement, as at an old friend gone unexpectedly to the devil. A few hairs and a spot of blood told tales. Shivering, he wiped them off.

He passed his tongue several times round his parched lips as he waited in the ghastly, accusing quietude of that rich hall.

Steps on the gravel—welcome steps. He went to the door noiselessly, set it suggestively ajar, stole back quick as a kitten to the fireplace, and the man outside came in without ringing, another prosperous suburb dweller, redolent of money and smoking a good cigar, with an overcoat over his dinner clothes. In his hand he held a long white envelope.

The representative of Messrs. Abbott & Abbott, solicitors, of No. 14a Bourne Street, W. C., received him with efficiency.

"Harker bad?" said Mr. George Robin. "Dear, oh! Dear, oh! I'm sorry. Shall I run up an' see him?"

"Well, my dear sir," said the little red-and-tawny man glibly, "I suppose he's better quiet. Says he's got a splitting head, and between you and me, he's not in the happiest of humors. That the document we want? I'll just glance at it. Ah, yes, that's right. Just a matter of precaution, you know. I'll give you my card as a—well, a sort of guarantee, shall I?—since you're giving this up without personal word with my client. There. We're Abbott & Abbott, you see. I believe the cook's gone to bed, and my client asks us to be sure to close the front door and to turn off the light in the hall."

No sound came from the closed room where Harker lay as they stepped out. The starlit night was frostily cold, but again that beady dew broke on the little man's brow, as, giving courteous precedence to his client's friend and neighbor, he stepped across the threshold and shut the heavy front door after them.

He managed to ask, in a throaty voice, for the station.

He was calculating, by the resources in his pocket, threepence for a ticket

to Notting Hill Gate, then a penny for a bus, and walk the rest.

He started for the station at a run, yet with clogged feet, like a hunted man in a nightmare.

Mr. Edward Harker was at his office no later than his usual hour on the morning of Christmas Eve, although his ruddy color had slightly faded, he moved a little stiffly, and a strip of court-plaster, about an inch above one ear, seemed to indicate some recent accident. His hair was parted with its accustomed accuracy; his mustache twirled upward, the least trifle waxed, very smart; his dazzling set of false teeth, the most perfect example of the art of dentistry that a wealthy man could buy, gleamed as he acknowledged his head clerk's salutation in his ever-genial way.

He sat down to write a personal and private letter by his own hand:

DEAR ROBIN: With reference to your telephone message as brought me by my cook this morning, it's quite all right about your handing over that document, which I asked you yesterday to keep pro tem, to the fellow who asked for it. As a matter of fact, the thing was of no importance, and thereby hangs a goodish tale, mostly against myself, which I'll be happy to tell you if you'll lunch with me at the usual place about one-thirty.

As a matter of fact, too, thanking you for your kind inquiries, it's not so much a feverish cold I'm suffering from—

At this point the head clerk sent in to say that the nameless visitor of yesterday waited in the anteroom.

"One moment," said Mr. Edward Harker imperturbably.

He reached for his hat, cocked it on one side slightly, till its black brim curled down to the strip of black court-plaster above one ear, winced a little at the tenderness thus brutally treated, and took up his favorite attitude on the hearthrug, with his hands in his trouser's pockets and his patent-leather boots well separated.

"Show him in," ordered Mr. Edward Harker.

The little red-and-tawny man, appearing as inoffensive as he had done yesterday, wearing the same greenish-black overcoat and the same cracked brown boots, came in and, receiving a kindly invitation so to do, sat himself down in the same opulent chair that he had occupied on his previous visit.

"Well?" inquired Mr. Edward Harker.

The little man drew out from his overcoat pocket two long envelopes; there was a distinct expression of simple pleasure in his face as he handed these over.

Mr. Edward Harker perused them and compared them, returned each to its envelope, and turned to his visitor with words of warm appreciation on his lips.

"And now," said he, sitting down with the bland air of one confidently expecting a ticklish story, "tell me what difficulties you encountered."

The little man was modest, ungifted in dramatic expression, bald to a fault, and almost excessively commonplace in his language. He conveyed, however, the gist of his undertaking in a short space of time.

"Very good," said Mr. Edward Harker, reaching for his cigar box, "ve-ry good indeed! Did my cousin try to get you to let me down?"

"He offered a hundred pounds," replied the little man indifferently.

"Did he? The dirty dog!" said Mr. Harker pleasantly. "Well, well! A hundred pounds are better than five, any day."

"I only wanted five," explained the little man, "and I contracted for five."

"Just so," said Mr. Harker hastily, diving a hand into his pocket and bringing up a little wad of notes. "I'll hand it over at once with my congratulations. Have a cigar?"

"No, thank you," replied the red-and-

tawny man, with a scornful glance at the proffered luxuries.

Mr. Edward Harker stared, and his black brows were two inquiring arches above his keen eyes.

"What—why——"

"I done your nasty business," said the little man, becoming, for the first time, excited, and therefore ungrammatical, "I done it because I got to get five pounds. But now I've finished with you. G'morning."

He rose, to make for the door.

"Here! Stop!" said Mr. Edward Harker, a little excited in his turn. "I have an offer to put before you, a business offer. I want you to enter my employment——"

"I don't want your offer," replied the little man, and most incorrigibly and respectably British he looked as he stood there holding his hat and his lump-headed stick.

"At a salary of five hundred a year to begin with," cried Mr. Harker, "increasing——"

The little red-and-tawny man left the office, looking the impersonation of British integrity and virtue, and for a little while Mr. Edward Harker stood before his fire, stunned into inaction. Then he struck his hand twice, imperiously, on the bell that summoned the head clerk himself.

"I've found a very suitable man for that Cuban mess of ours," said Mr. Edward Harker, and never had the head clerk seen him kindled to such enthusiasm, "horridly respectable, virtuous, reckless as a devil, stubborn as a pig, a reg'lar little lion of a man. You can't tempt him with drink, and you can't terrify him with difficulties, and—— Have you ever known a man refuse a hundred pounds to make five?"

"No, sir," replied the head clerk.

"Well, I have," said Mr. Edward Harker, "and I want him here with me—or, rather, out in Cuba just now. Fetch him back. The man's priceless."

"Certainly, sir," said the head clerk obligingly. "We'll write at once. What's his name and address, sir?"

Then Mr. Edward Harker sat down heavily.

"I—I didn't get it," said he. "I was so cocksure. It wouldn't have occurred to me that any one was too perishingly honest to stop and listen to explanations—to—to—certain explanations. We've seen an honest man, by George! You know they're priceless!"

One more unanswerable question Mr. Harker asked the head clerk, sadly, before he let him go.

"What need could a man possibly have that could be satisfied with five pounds, but not with a hundred? Or five hundred? Give it up?"

A little house in an interminable row of little houses had a palpitating air within and without of waiting for some one of importance. And presently that some one came like a god to all that waiting, listening, hoping house—the master of it, of very great importance, a regular Father Christmas of a man, a Universal Provider, all red and tawny.

In the hall he quickly did a vanishing trick with all his parcels, and the door of the coat cupboard closed fast upon its secrets. Only a turkey with its accouterments remained, and that was seized upon by an inquiring woman, who suddenly materialized in the hall with stealthy whisperings.

He nodded in reply to her, went upstairs, and opened the door of a first-floor bedroom, and there, sitting up in their beds by the faint beam of a night light, were four small children, all under six years old, their faces turned doorward.

The little red-and-tawny man advanced, looked around him with a great air of making sure that he had no audience save the terrestrial one now

grouped before him, and cautiously gave his news.

"Kids, mother and I told you we'd heard he wasn't coming this year, but the rumor's false. It was one of those

put-up tales. He'll be here long before you wake up in the morning. I've just seen him myself, coming over the roofs like a lamplighter and stopping at all the chimneys."

The February AINSLEE'S will publish the first part of "The Man Who Broke the Rule," a new novel by May Edginton, author of "The Woman Who Broke the Rule."



## THE HOUR

SO without pause or haste the hour draws near;  
The old year's dead, the new year's here.  
So was it when the formless void began;  
So will it be past the last cry of man.  
So fire and pest and the cyclonic storm  
Wreak their mad fury and exhaust their might;  
Sun, moon, and stars are born, and fade in night;  
Nations arise, achieve, and disappear;  
But without pause or haste the hour draws near;  
The old year's dead, the new year's here.  
Man strives and dares and wills to know  
The meaning of this brave, fantastic show.  
He fills the earth with wonders of his skill  
That have their name and day and place to fill,  
Until the next man's wonder claims the view;  
And nothing's ever old and nothing new.  
Man sweats and dreams and builds his votive fire  
Unto the gods of his supreme desire.  
Proudly he lifts his head into the skies,  
Strikes water from the rocks, serenely flies;  
He lies, loves, laughs, and dances, then he cries  
His joys and sorrows in immortal song  
To winds that perish as they pass along.  
He sins, pays, suffers, and he prays aloud,  
But all cries mingle in the crying crowd.  
Millions will die in war by millions slain  
That some crowned falsehood may remain and reign.  
And falsehood's hour is come; here is her bier,  
For without pause or haste the hour draws near;  
The old year's dead, the new year's here.  
Immortal hour, may we thy wisdom know,  
That we may *live* while passing here below.

EDWIN MILTON ROYLE.





# Bill Heenan Minds His Own Business

By William Slavens McNutt

Author of the "Bill Heenan" stories, etc.

A DULL roar of raw life in an infinity of fog and silence; a volcano of human passion blazing from the bosom of the wet earth; a section of turbulent hell aflame among the mysteriously whispering pines at the foot of the mighty mountain; a slum of Gomorrah reincarnate on the rain-soaked southeastern Alaska beach. That was Kaltishan when the North—the North of unthinkable sin and soul-stirring heroism, of bestial greed and martyr's sacrifice, the North of gold—was new.

It was a town of log huts and tents. It was a town of men who had slipped the leash of civilization, and of women who vended themselves under the red badge of shame. The devil in chief of the riotous camp was lust—lust for the women who sold for gold; his ally and servant was greed—greed for the gold wherewith to buy. The men fought the rugged earth for gold, died and gambled for gold, and for gold the carmed harpies parodied love.

To the frenzied camp, from the dim and little-known interior, came the toxic rumor of more gold, gold in unheard-of quantities, gold and to spare for all who dared the trail.

Big Bill Heenan lounged out of the Gold Creek Dance Hall, leaned against the corner of the building, and bared his head to the tonic of the thick, wind-driven mist. In the dark and fog, the one street of the camp was a dim, mysterious dream lane, peopled with fan-

tastic ghosts. The light from the saloons and dance halls made but faint inroads on the fog, pale, wavering shafts in which passing figures—weird in the blur of fog—became visible for an instant before passing into the oblivion of the night from which they had emerged so briefly.

Heenan felt gloriously alive. He was young, and strong with a wild, easy strength that had never been sapped by the fear, or even the thought, of a master. He was possessed of a keen, throbbing love of the life of his knowledge, an unthinking animal love of a thoughtless animal life, a love that knew no curb of conscience. He loved the trail and its hardships; he loved the lure of the search for gold; he loved the contest of his great, tireless body against the elements—the hard rock, the rushing glacial stream, the cold and the wet, the drive of storm and the steep of mountainside. He loved the thrill of gambling, the zest of a hand-to-hand fight, the savage "kick" of raw liquor—and he loved women. He loved women as he loved all other things of his life, keenly, carelessly, as unthinkingly as he breathed.

Lounging alone in the dark of the street before the dance hall, he was well content. The call of gold from a far place had come, and he was prepared to answer. His body was fit for the toil of the trail, his courage was tried and proved, and his craft in the conquest of the wilderness was second

to no man's. Strapped about his muscular waist beneath his thick blue shirt was a leather belt that held five hundred dollars in gold dust, the price of his share of an outfit with which he and three companions were to start the following day for the rumored Eldorado. Besides the five hundred in his belt, he had a hundred or so in dust in a soft leather pouch in his trousers pocket. That remained to be spent ere he took the trail. He idly considered the expenditure of this surplus as one might ponder a bill of fare. The money would buy a thrill at the roulette table or it would buy—a woman.

A figure materialized out of the wet blur of rain and fog, the slight, crouching figure of a woman with a shawl over her head. She stepped into the V of light that streamed from the open door of the dance hall and peered furtively in. Heenan glimpsed the white, strained face of a girl, a set, rain-wet face, rich with youth's wealth. Her eyes were large and deep and seal brown; her skin gave the promise of rose-leaf texture; her parted lips were soft curves of flame to Heenan's eyes.

He stepped forward as instinctively as he would have stooped to pick up a gold nugget on the trail. The girl looked up quickly, and her large, dark-brown eyes met his fairly for the fraction of a second. There was fear in them, fear and beseechment. The thirst for her surged up in him as irresistibly as the waters lift to the urge of the moon. Passion ran hot throughout his veins and shocked his brain to a sudden high intoxication.

The girl averted her face and walked quickly past him. A man stepped from the darkness into the V of light. His broad-brimmed felt hat was pulled low over eyes that were narrowed and intent with the look of the trailing animal. The exaltation of desire that was in Heenan turned on the instant to a frenzy of rage. With no word, only

a murmured snarl, he stepped forward and lashed out with his clenched right fist. The hard knuckles met the man's chin with a solid crunch that spoke the power in the blow. The man groaned, wavered to his knees, then forward on his face, like an ax-stricken ox, and lay so. With a sharp intake of breath, Heenan turned and hurried down the dark street in pursuit of the woman.

He caught step with her and took her by the arm.

"Lead me, sister," he invited jocularly. "I don't know the way to your shack. I thought I'd had a look at all the girls in camp, but I've never seen you before. New one, ain't yuh?"

"Yes," the girl muttered, after a little hesitation. "Yes—I'm a new one."

She stood silent, her head inclined forward. A sense of embarrassment stole over Heenan. He resented the lack of the brazen cordiality to which he was accustomed from the women he knew, and attributed it to the only cause he was aware of for the absence of a boisterous welcome.

"I'm no piker," he assured her with a short laugh. "I pay my way as I go or I don't start." He slipped the worn leather poke from his trousers pocket and pressed it into her hand. "You can be banker with that if you'll feel better about it. Come on."

"All right," the girl said dully, and hurried along at his side. She stumbled frequently, and her breath was quick and labored. Heenan wondered whether she was half drunk or drugged. According to his knowledge, her excitement must be due to one of the two causes.

In silence they threaded a devious path, through the wet dark between irregularly scattered tents and huts, for some little distance up the half-cleared mountainside. Before the low door of a two-room log hut, the girl stopped. While she fumbled with the latch, Heenan slipped his fingers about the

butt of a short-barreled .38 in the pocket of his Mackinaw. He knew from experience that it was always well to be prepared.

With a reckless smile on his lips, he followed her into the dark hut, equally ready for a blow or a kiss. He went rigid at the sudden scratch of a match. The flame caught on the lamp wick, and Heenan's eyes warily searched the room that the light revealed. A wooden bunk, a stove, a table, the bare log walls—no concealment for an enemy in that room.

There was yet another room to look into. But Heenan looked first at the woman, and in his consciousness caution ceased to exist. Her beauty startled him breathless. She was a young girl, a slender, full-bosomed young girl, with a woman's richness of known passion and sorrow in her lustrous eyes. She was afraid of him; her fear was evident in her shrinking posture, her wide eyes. The fear, the evident instinct toward denial, flight, brightened the mounting flame of the man's desire with the lure of the chase. Heenan laughed joyously and with outstretched arms stepped toward her. A sharp cry from the next room interrupted him. He stopped short, whipped out his revolver, and, with the muzzle trained on the crouching woman, backed to the wall.

"What's the game?" he growled. "What are you dealin' me, huh? If yuh figured on pickin' me, you're out of luck. I'm not ripe yet, sister. Who's in that room?"

The woman was aquiver with a great terror. She wet her dry lips with her tongue and strove to answer, but no words came. Heenan's brilliant blue eyes narrowed to tiny pin points of evil light.

"Open that door!" he commanded. "Open that door an' leave it open! Walk into that room an' walk in slow. Carry the lamp with you. This gun of

mine is a sudden talker. If anythin' starts, I'll get yuh. In yuh go!"

Dumb with a terror that puzzled Heenan, the woman obeyed. Following her closely, he peered over her shoulder and swore his amazement. On the bunk lay a year-old baby, its tiny features grotesquely twisted, blinking dazedly at the light. It rolled its head from side to side, and a repetition of the cry that had first startled Heenan issued from its throat. The woman set the lamp on the table and, with a murmured croon, knelt by the infant and gathered it in her arms.

Heenan watched, bewildered and angry.

"What's your game?" he demanded roughly. "What are you tryin' to hand me?"

Two slow, hard-born tears started from the girl's eyes and slipped down her cheeks.

"I'm hungry," she said monotonously. "My baby's hungry."

"Hungry!" Heenan echoed. "Say, who are yuh?"

"I'm 'Bull' Engel's woman," she answered miserably.

Heenan started violently. Young Bull Engel—he of the black, curly hair, massive shoulders, and bold, handsome features, one of the most desperate of all the gamblers and gunmen from Denver to Kaltishan—was one of the three with whom Heenan had thrown in his lot to start for the new gold fields on the morrow.

"You Bull Engel's wife?" he demanded.

The girl shook her head.

"His woman," she corrected him monotonously. "I'm hungry."

"Has Bull——"

"He's left me."

"His kid?" Heenan inquired.

The girl nodded assent.

"An' you mean to tell me yuh ain't got enough to eat?"

"I'm hungry," the girl reiterated.  
"My baby's hungry."

"Why, there's plenty in this camp would help yuh," Heenan assured her. "What for d'yuh want to go hungry?"

"There's only one way any man'll help another man's woman," the girl said bitterly.

"That's why yuh let me come along up here with yuh to-night?"

"I'm hungry," the girl repeated in defense and explanation. "My baby's hungry."

"Hell!" Heenan commented heartily. "This won't do. I know Bull—I'll go see him."

"He knows. He wouldn't help. He'd only fight. I was just his woman, and he's done with me."

Heenan realized the truth of her statement. If she had been Bull's "woman," and Bull was "done with her," that *was* the end of it. Heenan had no thought that Engel could or should be held accountable. Deserting a wife was one thing, but severing relations with a "woman"—

He stared hard at the girl, and a flush of embarrassment reddened his face.

"You seem more like a wife, somehow, than—than—"

The girl laughed mirthlessly.

"I thought I was to be. We ran away, I thought to get married. Bull's folks are neighbors of ours in St. Louis. They're nice people. They don't know what Bull is. He came home on a visit, and I fell in love with him. That's only a little more than a year ago."

She mentioned the length of time in a tone of awe. That such a span of tragedy and degradation should be compressed into one year of time!

The child had dropped off to sleep. The girl laid him on the bunk and faced Heenan defiantly.

"Well?" she said.

Heenan averted his eyes.

"You've got that poke of mine," he mumbled. "There's about a hundred or so in it. I don't need it." He rose and turned to the door. "Good night," he said shortly.

The girl caught him by the sleeve as he laid his hand on the outer door.

"You're—going?" she asked.

Heenan nodded. He met her eyes briefly and turned away. There was a vague question in them that shamed him.

"Why?" she demanded.

Heenan made no answer. He could think of none adequate. He did not know why. Nothing in his conscious philosophy of life explained his going. Of the instinct that bade him go, stamped into the blood of him generations before by the lives of noble Scotch and Irish ancestors to whom chivalry had been a religion, he knew naught.

The girl dropped to her knees, sobbing, and clasped his big hand in both her own.

"I thank you," she said brokenly. "I'd come to think all men were like Engel. I've wanted to—to kill my boy. I'd rather kill him now with my own hands than have him grow to be the beast his father is. You're good! He's going to be like you, my Carl."

"Naw," Heenan said, in alarm. "You're wrong. I ain't no different than Bull or anybody else." He studied the kneeling girl thoughtfully. "What yuh goin' to do when that hundred of mine's gone?"

"I don't know."

"Whyn't yuh go back to St. Louis? Take the kid with yuh an' tell 'em Bull died, or—or somethin'. You'd do better back there, wouldn't yuh?"

"Home!" the girl said softly, a great longing in her voice. "Go home! Oh, if I only could!"

"Why can't you? Oh, costs a good deal, don't it? Well, that hundred's all I can spare. I know Bull's got

quite a wad. He won a bunch at stud the early part o' the evenin'. I'll go see him."

"No," the girl said affrightedly. "It's useless. He'll kill you."

Heenan grinned comfortably. He was on familiar ground.

"Why, I reckon not," he said, with a calculating air. "I wouldn't prophesy that. He may beller an' stamp some, but I wouldn't count on him hornin' me very deep. You stay here. I'll stop at the Star on my way down an' have 'em send up the best hot meal they can throw together."

Bull Engel leaned on the pine bar of the Gay Trail Dance Hall, loudly recounting his killing of a fellow gambler in Virginia City to a crowd of hangers-on who were glad to simulate admiration in return for frequent rounds of liquor. Heenan elbowed his way through the noisy throng and laid his hand on Engel's arm. In answer to his whispered communication, Bull nodded and followed him to a deserted table at one side of the hall.

"What do you want?" he demanded, when they were seated.

Heenan was no man to dodge issues.

"Your woman an' kid are hungry," he informed Bull bluntly.

Engel sat perfectly still for several seconds, stunned by the unexpectedness of Heenan's words.

His first move was the move Heenan had anticipated. As Engel rose, his hand going to his coat pocket, he glimpsed the muzzle of Heenan's gun peeping over the tabletop. Slowly, his eyes riveted on the black muzzle of the menacing gun, Engel moved his hands away from his sides, and slowly, inch by inch, he lifted them.

"Set down," Heenan commanded shortly.

Engel obeyed. He was a gunman and knew the rules of the game. As he resumed his seat, he laid his hands

on the table in front of him. Heenan acknowledged the action with a grunt, the satisfied grunt of approval with which a card player might greet the proper play by his opponent.

"Your woman an' kid's hungry, Bull," he went on apologetically. "I know it's none of my business——"

"You're damn' right it ain't!" Bull agreed with him passionately. "How do you know they're hungry?" Then he leaned over and leered. "It's all clear with me, Bill," he declared. "She ain't a bad kid. I'm all through up there. Go as far as you like."

Slowly, stammering with embarrassment, Heenan told of his meeting and talk with the woman. Engel listened with mounting amazement, and at the conclusion of the tale, roared with laughter.

"Got you for a hundred!" he gurgled. "She's a money getter! I ought to hang on to her. She may be worth somethin' yet. Got you for a hundred! That's good!"

"Aw, give the girl a chance," Heenan pleaded. "Give her a chance, Bull. You're heeled; you got enough to stake her for her fare home. She hadn't ought to have to play that kind of a game."

"Why not? I paid her bills while I had her, didn't I? Sure! I'm done. Let some other guy kick through. What I want to stake her for now? I'm through, ain't I?"

Heenan nodded thoughtfully. He understood Engel's argument and did not question his moral right to do what he was doing. The girl had been Engel's; Engel had paid the bills while he had possessed her. Now he was "through," and Heenan felt that the only possible appeal was to his generosity.

"Be a good fellow an' give the girl a chance, Bull," he pleaded, choking down his pride. "She's a nice little kid, an' she don't want to play this game up



here. You're off winner at stud, Bull. Stake the kid to a chance to make it home, will yuh?"

"I will not!" Bull declared heatedly. "You mind your own business, see? This is no horn-in of yours, Heenan. You mind your own business! You've thrown in with me an' Ed an' Whitey on this outfit we're goin' to buy out tomorrow, an' I don't want no row with a trail pardner, so I'll forget this foolishness of yours. But lay off me, see? You mind your own business."

Heenan sighed deeply.

"I ain't goin'," he informed Engel. "The deal's off."

Engel stared his surprise.

"You can't put over any 'sandy,' Bill. There's plenty would be glad to take your place with us an' pay their bit."

"Get somebody," Heenan said shortly. "I ain't goin'."

A contemptuous grin of comprehension disfigured Engel's features.

"I see! Goin' to keep my old bunk warm, are you? Goin' to pass up your good chance, to play with my old girl! All right! I'm done. You're the sucker—swallow the hook. You ain't a bad guy, Bill, but you'll never belong till you learn to mind your own business. Not comin' with us, huh? Well, good-by!"

With eyes devoid of expression, Heenan watched Engel swagger back to the bar. Then he rose and went wearily out into the night.

He stopped before a building in front of which flared a gasoline torch. Below the torch, a scrawled sign announced that the *Helsa* sailed for Seattle and all points below at nine o'clock in the morning, and that transportation was to be purchased inside. Heenan swore petulantly and entered.

Poor Heenan was most painfully embarrassed. He had meant to deliver the ticket and the money to Bull's woman and then disappear. But there

had been so many things to be done, and unless he had done them, the woman would not have been able to get away on the morning boat. More than all else, he had tried to escape seeing her off, but it had been useless. He must stay with her until the ship left the dock. In that mad, weird, cruel world of the early North, the bewildered little girl mother had found one man to whom she was not prey, and she clung to him like a terrified child to its father.

Her gratitude smothered Heenan. To his understanding, he was a fool. What remained of his five hundred, after the ticket had been bought, he had given to the woman for her further expenses on the trip. He was stripped of his opportunity for an early look at the new gold fields; he was cheated of the orgy that the five hundred would have bought him in the dance halls. He was a fool, and his folly was inevitable. He accepted it in the same spirit with which he accepted loss at the gaming tables, robbery by the dance-hall girls, or the soggy ache of stale drink. The woman's oft-expressed opinion of him as a hero, a wonderful and good man, irritated him. He was no such thing in his own mind—he was just a fool, and her every word and look reminded him afresh of his folly.

Mute and sulky, he stood with her on the deck of the steamer, the twenty minutes yet remaining before her departure weighing on him like so many weary days. He wished she would stop holding the baby close to him and trying to interest the infant in him. In maternal patois, she gurgled the praise of this great and good man to her uninterested son, and Heenan suffered.

At length the baby's interest became aroused. It was not Heenan that caused its eyes to brighten and its legs to wiggle ecstatically; it was a bright flash of color on one of Heenan's big

fingers—a heavy, rough gold ring set with the point of a bear's tooth. The child cooed and gurgled and pawed the air frantically in an endeavor to locate the trinket with its hands. It succeeded at length, and shoved and pulled at it experimentally, its eyes solemn and speculative.

The "All ashore!" was shouted. Heenan muttered a good-by and turned away. The shrill cry of the child halted him. The baby screamed and struggled and clutched at the air with its little hands. Heenan wondered if it would die at once or linger.

"No, no, pretty one," the girl mother crooned, as she rocked the squalling child in her arms. "Can't have man's ring. Can't have nice man's ring, pretty sweetheart. No, mother's child can't have nice man's pretty ring."

She looked up at Heenan and smiled through the tears in her dark eyes.

"He wants your ring," she explained. "Good-by, Mr. Heenan. I can't put my thanks into words. Good-by. No, mother's child can't have nice man's ring."

The child seemed to understand the refusals, for it screamed the louder.

"Ashore there, you!" the mate yelled at Heenan. "Want to have to swim for it?"

The boat was moving. A little gap appeared between the rail and the dock—and widened. Heenan was terror-stricken. It seemed to him that the child was indeed dying. And all for his ring!

Heenan valued the ring. With his knife he had slain the bear from whose jaw the tooth had come. He carried the scars of that conflict on his body, and the ring was the insignia of a hard-won victory. The baby's face grew purple, the gap between the boat and the dock grew wider, and Heenan grew desperate. He tore off the ring, thrust it into the mother's hand, leaped

to the rail, poised thereon, and sprang across the widening chasm to the dock.

He did not look back. All he wanted to do was get away. A familiar, mocking laugh halted him. Bull Engel stood near by, watching the woman who had been his and the child of his flesh on the deck of the receding boat, and jeering.

"She give yuh the slip, huh?" he mocked Heenan. "Maybe you'll mind your own business after this. Lost out all around, didn't yuh? Yeh? Maybe you'll learn somethin'. Maybe you'll learn to mind your own business, huh?"

Heenan was too dispirited to resent the gibes. He walked disconsolately away. In the same spirit with which one lingers in an old room once common to friends long lost, Heenan felt through his empty pockets.

"Even my ring!" he wailed to himself. "Hell's bells on a frosty night! Even my ring!"

Heenan was lonesome. There were a half a hundred men within call, and the scene was as familiar to him as the sun. He was squatting by the side of the trail that led from the coast to the new Alvak strike, frying a pan of bacon over a tiny fire and nursing his mood of gentle gloom. The strings of pack horses, the laden men trudging along under great back loads, the fragments of profanity that echoed along the exasperating parody of a trail, the prophecies of failure and fortune, the humor that the muscle-wracked chechahco lent to the scene, and the impression of scientifically applied power imparted by the old sour doughs in their every move—all were as much a part of Heenan's life experience as the daily round of domestic duties to an old housewife.

It was a midsummer stampede to the new strike at Alvak in the interior. The struggle was an old story to

Heenan, a tale that had been told so often that he missed something in it he had once heard plainly. He missed the enthusiasm with which he had listened in the years that were gone; he had not the youthful ear that had hearkened eagerly for something new and strange at each repetition. At the end of the trail, he might find gold. He tasted this thought experimentally, and found it without savor. He had found gold before—and spent it. From the archives of his memory, he dragged forth recollections of the spending, and mused over them. His study of them imbued him with no driving desire for their reëxperience. If he found gold, of course he would spend it—as he had spent it before; if he failed to find it, he would go on searching as he had searched before. Temporarily broke or temporarily rich, he knew the answer—and the answer failed to rouse interest in him. He had heard it too often.

He watched the men pass on the trail. Contemptuously he classed them one and all as chechahcos. Some he knew to have followed the northern trails for ten, twelve, fifteen years, but—chechahcos! He had been a dyed-in-the-wool sour dough before those alleged old-timers had heard of the territory. Some of the men he saw dated back to the early days of Dawson, Fairbanks, and Nome. Bah! He had known the ways of the country when Circle City had been new—and before. He felt himself a true aristocrat of the North, and in his loneliness had no desire to hold converse with any of the upstarts who called greetings to him.

Youth caught his eye and aroused his interest. Fifty yards to the left and down the slope from him, Old Man Harnett was cooking dinner, while Bessie, his seventeen-year-old daughter, and "Curly" played love.

"Curly" was the only name any one in the country knew him by. He was

a slim, dark-eyed boy of about twenty, with frank, fine features and a mop of curly black hair. Heenan liked him, in a whimsical sort of way, and he liked Bessie Harnett. Her mother was dead. She had attended school "below" till she was fifteen, and then joined her prospector father. She roughed it with him and loved it. She was bareheaded, and her thick yellow hair hung in one braid down her back. She wore a gray flannel blouse, a short corduroy skirt, and thick, high boots. On the trail she was of more help than the average boy of her age would have been, and her joys had been the joys of a healthy boy—a rifle, travel with the dogs or pack horses, the hard, venturous life of the wilderness.

And then, on this trail, she had met Curly. Heenan noted that she wore a bow of ribbon on her braid, and chuckled with amused understanding. Hitherto, Bessie's hair had been to her merely a bothersome, useless something to be kept out of the way in the simplest possible manner. And she was not helping in the preparation of the dinner. Before she had met Curly, her father had found the meals prepared almost before he could get around to assisting with them. Now he cooked alone and unaided, with many a malevolent side glance at the black-haired young fellow engrossed in conversation with his daughter. Heenan analyzed the game and knew that it had not progressed far. As yet it was a glance that confused, quickened heartbeats at sight of each other, some mild, sweet fear of the path they were treading, a discovery of mutual interest in things that neither of them had ever given a thought to before, alternative moods of inexplicable elation and gloom.

His amused study of them was interrupted by a hail from the trail nearby. He turned and stared at the man who had called to him, a big, thick-

set man with iron-gray hair. Heenan could not place him, though he knew that he had seen him before. The man approached a little hesitantly.

"You're Heenan, ain't yuh?" he questioned.

Heenan nodded.

"Remember me?" the man went on.

"I know I've seen you before, but I don't recollect where."

"Kaltishan," the man helped him out. "Back in——"

Heenan leaped to his feet with a whoop of pleased recognition.

"Bull Engel!" he shouted. "You old hound, you! I'm glad to see you! I ain't laid eyes on you for——"

"'Bout twenty years. The last time I seen you—say, you remember? You jumped off the rail of a boat——"

Heenan's yowl of laughter interrupted him.

"I'd been seein' that woman off," he took up the narrative, slapping his thigh gleefully. "Yuh mind, I——"

"That girl of mine," Engel inserted his bit of the story. "She'd stung you for——"

"Even my ring," Heenan admitted, with streaming eyes. "She had all my money, an' then, by Jing, just as the boat pulled out, blamed if the kid didn't get to me for my ring! I'm tellin' yuh, Bull, I jumped off o' that boat as clean as a sea gull. They even scoured my ring off o' me! Oh, my!"

"You sure were a sucker, Bill."

"Wasn't I, though? Yuh know what, Bull? I give her money to go back to St. Louis with! Yes, I did! Give her everythin' I had. She sure did get to me right! Ever hear of her?"

"Naw, I ain't heard from home since then. My folks used to live near hers. We was kids together. I wonder if she went home?"

"Claimed she was goin'. It's me that knows she had the price to get there."

Bull shook his head.

"I never heard. My folks weren't

my kind. They were a churchgoin' lot. I used to go back once in a while, an' write to 'em now an' then, but finally I says, 'What's the use? They ain't my kind an' I ain't theirs.' So I just quit writin', an' I never been back."

"Well, Bull Engel! It sure is good to see a real old-timer. Set in here with me an' have most o' what I got. Goin' into the Alvah, huh? Well, I sure am glad to see yuh!"

Laughing heartily, interrupting each other to recall old happenings and half-forgotten names, they squatted by the fire to share the meal. To Heenan there was nothing to mar his enjoyment of this talk with his fellow old-timer. Heenan felt that, in giving the woman the money to leave the country, he had acted the part of a fool; he laughed with his friend Engel at this old folly of his youth. Engel had been within his rights. He—Heenan—had been an impulsive fool. He had let a woman "sting" him. Neither of the men was at all embarrassed by the old episode.

Bessie Harnett and Curly passed near, on their way to the mountain stream for a pail of water. Curly carried the bucket. Heenan saw them and laughed.

"Curly, if I was twenty years younger an' good lookin', I'd make you go some for a chance to carry that bucket."

Curly flushed and grinned.

"You'd have to go some to get it away from me," he retorted.

Bessie looked over her shoulder saucily, winked, and made a face at Heenan.

Engel stared after the girl uglily.

"Whoo-ee!" he ejaculated. "Some lovely lady! Say, boy, ain't she a girl to make a man glad he's a man? What? Say, no underdone kid's got any right to anythin' that fine! No! A man can't appreciate anythin' that sweet till he's just about my age and weight,

Bill. Me, I think I just sure got to have that. Who is she?"

Heenan looked at him with a frown of disgust.

"Lay off!" he growled. "Can't yuh get by without raidin' the kindergarten?"

Engel smiled nastily.

"Still buttin' in, Bill? Yuh ain't never learned the good of mindin' your own business, have you?"

Heenan checked the impulse to anger that rose in him. Engel was right. It was a man's business to mind his own business. The temporary sense of friction passed, and soon they were laughing heartily again at recollections of the olden time.

The history of the first winter of any camp to which there has been a considerable summer stampede is always a story of turmoil, hunger, desperation, avarice, and self-sacrificing nobility. The first winter in Alvak was a hard one. The camp was just accessible enough to tempt the chechahco with nothing to go on but hope, and the old-timer with naught but experience. It was just inaccessible enough to make provisions costly and hard to get through in answer to a sudden demand. As a result, there were scores of desperate men in the camp who had nothing, hundreds of frightened men who had a little—and hoarded their scanty stock of grub and money with the frantic care of a miser—and some few—"practical men" is the kindly name for them—who had a surplus and vended it at the highest price need could force from the less fortunate.

There was no winter work that first year. There was not a boiler on any of the creeks, so steam thawing was out of the question. On the claims, men existed in their small log huts, eating, smoking, sleeping, and growing daily more quarrelsome. Enforced

inaction of this sort breeds panics and deeds of violence, which, in the sanity of a later, healthy activity, are incomprehensible to the perpetrators themselves.

In the camp there was a dangerous tension. No one was in danger of actual starvation; scores were in danger from the fear of it. On a physician's order, a patient can abstain from food for two weeks or more with no alarming loss of vitality; the same patient, in the wilderness with the fear of death burning up his capital of energy, dies of the starvation he fears in a very few days. So it was fear that the camp suffered from most—fear and the greed that preys on it. There had been several small thefts of grub. To the men in the camp, these petty thefts were the most heinous crimes imaginable. The most terrible of deaths was too easy for the thief. A starving man caught burgling food or gold would have had short shrift, and but meager evidence would have been needed to convict him. Each man suspected his fellows. Hatred, greed, fear, suspicion—all combined to form an emotional explosive that it needed but the semblance of proof of guilt against some one to touch off.

Heenan avoided the camp. He had located ten miles distant on Piper Creek, and spent his time alone in his tiny cabin or on long hunting trips in the hills. But the weather was consistently bad and game startlingly scarce. In January he ran short of meat, and trudged away to the camp for the first time since winter had set in. The first acquaintance he met was Bull Engel, and with him he entered the Log Palace to get a drink. Bull was radiant with an offensive satisfaction.

"I put it over," he confided to Heenan as he poured his drink.

"Put what over?"

"You know—little Bessie Harnett.



Mind, I told you she could eat out of my plate? Well, I put it over."

Heenan felt a queer prickle along his spinal column. Had he possessed the natural protective coat of his early ancestors, the hair down the middle of his back would have risen to that quiver of nerves. The ages had shorn him of his natural protection against the weather, but the anger he felt was experienced in the same form in the dawn of mortal history, and will not have changed in the twilight.

"You lie!" he informed Engel quietly. His tone was casual, but his eyes were brilliant with battle light. "Bull, you lie like a dog!"

To Heenan's surprise, Engel made no hostile move. In tone and look he was propitiatory.

"Don't get me wrong, Bill," he begged earnestly. "I mean that I'm goin' to marry her."

Heenan stared for a moment in silence and then laughed shortly and tossed off his drink.

"Don't let her find it out," he advised sarcastically and with a frankly disapproving appraisal of Engel's thick person, "or she'll change your plans."

It was evident that he had touched a sore spot.

"These half-grown kids don't know what they want," Engel said sourly. "I didn't bother with kissin' an' soft talk. I'll tend to makin' her like me after the parson's done his bit. I went straight to headquarters an' got mine."

"The old man?"

Engel nodded.

"He'll make her toe the mark when the time comes—an' it's comin' soon. I'll get him where I want him." His evil face assumed a look of disgusting joy, and he continued in a ludicrously sentimental drawl: "I'm goin' to marry her, Bill. She's the only one I ever see that I'd marry—tie myself right down to, you know. But I'll marry her.

You bet! Say, listen, Bill. She's the prettiest——"

"How do yuh mean, yuh got him where yuh want him?" Heenan interrupted.

Engel smiled slyly.

"The old boy's awful fond of pickin' 'em up an' layin' 'em down, Bill. He likes to spend money to see what he'll get—the old poker thing. I helped him while away the time, see?"

Heenan glanced significantly at Engel's hands.

"They used to be clever," he admitted. "You ain't never spoiled 'em workin', I reckon."

Engel thumbed his finger ends complacently.

"They still behave," he boasted. "Honest, Bill, she's the best——"

"Good-by," Heenan exploded, backing away with upraised hands. "A girl-sick young fellow is a pest, but an old hound like you with marryin' on the brain is just medicine; that's all—just medicine! An' I ain't sick. Good-by!"

Old Man Harnett greeted Heenan grumpily. Heenan watched him as they talked, and noted on his face the plaintive, questioning, helpless look that announces the resumption of mental childhood.

"How's the world treatin' yuh?" he inquired of the old man.

"Scandalous," Harnett quavered angrily. "I been a hard-workin' man all my life, Bill, an' I got a right to somethin' more than this. The world owes me somethin' better. I don't care if I do like to play a card now an' ag'in; I got a right to some pleasure for the work I done, ain't I?"

"Been runnin' wrong for yuh, have they?"

"No luck—no luck at all! You never seen the beat! That feller Engel's so lucky he——"

"Engel get into yuh pretty hard?"

"He got all that I—all that—all——"

The old man's thin voice broke in a sob, and he laid his head on the table and cried. "Have—have you got any money, Bill?" he asked brokenly. "Or any spare grub you could let a man have? I'm in bad, Bill. If I could just last through till summer——"

"I ain't got a pound nor a dollar to spare," Heenan told him regretfully.

The old man roused suddenly, a wild light in his faded, childish eyes.

"She's gotta do it!" he raved. "She's gotta do it, that's all! He likes her, an' he'll be good to her. She's gotta do it!"

He turned, as the outer door opened, and confronted his daughter.

"You gotta do it!" he shrieked on, brandishing his fist. "Don't you talk back to me, young lady! Don't you look at me like that, neither! He's as good as anybody else. I won't stay here to be looked at like that by my own daughter!"

He grabbed up his cap and Mackinaw, thrust the girl aside, and rushed out, muttering unintelligibly. The girl sighed and closed the door. She nodded dispiritedly to Heenan, slipped into a chair, and stared unseeingly at the floor.

"Can't Curly help you out?" Heenan asked.

Bessie shook her head.

"He gave us everything he had. I didn't know. I thought he had plenty and was just loaning us what he could spare. But it was all he had, and dad gambled even that away to Engel. Even that!"

Heenan clucked his sympathy.

"I'm flat," he confessed. "Isn't there some one——"

"To help us out?" the girl finished bitterly. "Plenty. Of them all, I guess Engel's offer is the best. He'll marry me."

"Bull can dig himself four aces out of a brickbat," Heenan declared. "He's been cheatin' your dad."

Bessie shrugged.

"I know it. But what good does it do me? I can't prove it. And what if I could?"

Heenan had no comforting answer. He was troubled by a vague resentment against the order of things that he had accepted as inevitable. He thought of Bull's "woman" at Kaltishan, and her trouble; of Bessie and the fate that seemed to be linking her to Engel. Engel's admonition, "Mind your own business," ran through his brain in monotonous reiteration. A dim wonder as to who or what the author of all this business might be, and why the confusion of sorrow and helplessness was permitted, irked him. While he pondered silently, the door opened and Old Man Harnett crept back in. He was bowed and shaking and pitifully repentant. He hobbled to his daughter and infolded the girl in his withered old arms.

"You just leave it to your old dad," he babbled. "I ain't all through yet, by a dum sight, girlie. You're my little girl, an' I ain't goin' to see you fed to no old alligator like Engel, honey. You ain't goin' to have to marry with him. You mustn't mind what I say when I'm all fretted, honey. I don't mean half I say when I'm worried. You leave it to your old dad. I'll fix things right for you somehow."

Heenan rose and clapped on his fur cap.

"How long you goin' to be around, Bill?" the old man quavered.

Bessie's eyes, tragic with hopelessness, looked into Heenan's across her father's bent gray head.

"A week or so," Heenan mumbled, and hurried out.

He had meant to return to his claim the following day. His sudden decision to stay, caused by the sorrow he had read in the girl's eyes, seemed to him both futile and foolish. There was

nothing he could do. It was none of his business. Whose business was it?

Curly invited him to the meeting. It was a gathering of a select few in the rear room of the Log Palace, to plan for the capture of a thief, who, within the three days Heenan had been in camp, had stolen small sums of gold from five different cabins. There were eight men at the meeting, including Old Man Harnett, Curly, and Heenan.

"Whoever this thief is, he's a gentleman," Curly declared laughingly. "All the men he's robbed have been men who've got some to spare—and he only took a little from each one."

"If we catch him, the world will be shy one gentleman soon," Dave Ramon declared darkly. Dave was one of the well-to-do five who had been robbed.

"Let's get him first," "Flap" Rogers, another victim, advised. "What's the plan?"

Strategic ideas seemed scarce. Old Man Harnett offered the first that met with favor.

"Set a trap," he advised. "Set a trap an' advertise the bait. Everybody knows 'Buck' Mason keeps his gold in the safe here at the Palace. He just leaves it there, an' once a month they add up his bill for drinks, chips, an' grub, take that much out of his poke, an' put it in another poke that belongs to the house in the same safe. It's a joke all over camp that Buck's money never moves. Now Buck's just moved into that little shack right in back o' here, ain't he?"

"He has," Curly admitted gruffly.

Curly had moved from that little shack to make room for Buck. He had moved because he had been unable to pay the rental on it. His inability to pay had been due to his loan to Harnett of the money that the old man had gambled away to Engel. Curly had moved into another shack, already

occupied by five impecunious friends, and the length of his stay there depended on the extent of their charity.

"Get Buck to fake a row with Freeman, here at the Palace, an' take his money out o' the safe," Harnett outlined his plan further. "Have him mosey round an' tell everybody about the row an' how he's took his money out. He can boast how nobody'll dare try to steal any of his dust. He's a boastin' fool anyhow, an' it'll seem natural. Then leave him play drunk here at the Palace or up at the Snow King, an' we'll keep a watch from the back room here on his cabin. Whoever's doin' this thievin'll mebbe take a chance on gettin' in while Buck's soused, an' we can nab him. How's that?"

"If I didn't know better, I'd think you had sense," Flap Rogers said, thus delivering a left-handed compliment and his approval of the plan at one and the same time. "Let's go hunt up Buck."

It was monotonous work, waiting in the darkened room in the rear of the Log Palace. Conversation was taboo. To watch in relays was too risky. The thief might mark the men coming from or entering the rear room and become suspicious.

So all of the men in the plan, with the exception of Harnett and Buck Mason, waited silently in the tiny, chill room, taking turns at the window that looked out on the small shack in the rear. Harnett was home in bed, delirious with fever. Buck had advertised his row and the withdrawal of his money. He was in the barroom of the Snow King, satisfactorily drunk and talkative. He had mentioned the fact that his dust was in his shack in the rear of the Palace, and boasted with convincing bravado that it was safe because no man cared to try anything that might bring him in conflict with

Buck Mason. Buck, the bad, bad man—according to Buck.

Ten o'clock came—and no burglar. Eleven o'clock, and no one had attempted to enter the shack. At eleven-thirty, the man on guard at the window gave a warning hiss. The others in the room crowded to the little aperture and peered out. A shadowy form was visible in the gloom by the door of the shack. There was the sound of a latch being raised, and the form disappeared. The man had entered the shack. He was trapped.

Heenan led the way. He opened the rear door and hurried out, followed by the rest. As he reached the door of the shack, the intruder inside lit a match. Heenan threw open the door and leaped in.

In the light from the tiny flame of the match that the burglar held between thumb and forefinger, Heenan recognized Bull Engel. Bull was peering at a small slip of paper that he held up to the light of the match.

He dropped the match as Heenan leaped in, and the tiny flame winked out. In the darkness Heenan groped for Engel and caught him by the wrist. He felt the flutter of a slip of paper against his palm as Engel's fingers opened in answer to the grip on his wrist. Heenan clutched the slip of paper mechanically and held it. The next instant others were on Engel, throttling him, bearing him to the floor. Heenan released his grasp of the man and stood aside, waiting. Some one lit a lamp. The prisoner was jerked roughly to his feet. Flap Rogers swore in amazement at sight of him.

"Bull Engel, eh?" he said menacingly. "If it was some poor, half-starved guy, I'd feel like givin' him a chance. But Bull Engel! Why, he's got plenty!"

"What's all this?" Bull demanded dazedly. "A frame-up?"

"Frame-up!" Curly spat contemptu-

ously. "You're caught with the goods! So you're the gold thief, eh? Cheating Old Man Harnett at cards wasn't fast enough for you! You had to turn thief!"

Engel paled.

"Listen, boys, if this is a joke, tell me and I'll laugh," he agreed shakily. "But if you're in earnest, you've got me wrong. Is it a joke?"

"Call bein' killed for a thief a joke?" Rogers inquired. "That's the joke we aim to play on you right-soon."

"But I—I had a date here," Engel stammered. "I come here to meet—to meet—"

"Who?" Rogers pressed him.

"Bessie Harnett," Engel muttered sullenly.

Curly leaped forward and struck him full on the mouth.

"You lie!" he declared. "Leave her out of this, or I'll kill you where you stand!"

"But I did come here to meet her. I got her note here."

"Where?" Rogers questioned.

"I was readin' it when you busted in—readin' it over to see if I had the time right. It's here somewheres—on the floor, mebbe."

A search failed to reveal the note. The man's attempted alibi made the men, if anything, more venomous.

"I reckon we might as well end this," Rogers said. "Shootin's too good for him, but it's quick an' easy. We'll draw lots to see who—"

"But she wrote me to meet her here at eleven-thirty, I tell you," Engel insisted wildly. "I found the note slipped under my door when I got up to-day. I was readin' it over when you butted in. I don't know how it got lost. I been framed, I tell you!"

"Why should she tell you to meet her here?" Flap Rogers asked disgustedly. "That's a fool alibi! This is Buck Mason's shack. What did you figure she'd be doin' here?"

"I just figured she'd been puttin' the goody-goody stuff across on me an' been pretty friendly on the sly with Buck," Engel admitted meanly, and Heenan held the raging Curly away from him. "When I got the note, I looked Buck up an' found he was awful drunk an' not like to get far from a bar, so I supposed she was—was— While Buck was off on this tear—I thought—"

"You thought up a bum alibi," Rogers said darkly. "Where's the note?"

"I don't know," Engel wailed. "I had it. Will you go ask her? Will you please go ask her?"

"I'll go," Heenan volunteered, while Curly struggled to get at the prisoner. "Hold him in the back room of the Palace till I get back."

On his way to the Harnett cabin, Heenan stepped into the Snow King and, smoothing out the slip of paper he had kept concealed, read:

DEARIE: Meet me in the cabin back of the Palace at eleven-thirty to-night. BESS.

The "the" before "cabin" was written above the line of the other words and over a number of black lines closely drawn that evidently blotted out a word. Heenan slipped the note into his pocket and hurried to the Harnett cabin.

Bessie opened the door and laid her finger to her lips warningly.

"He's awfully sick," she explained, in a whisper, nodding toward her father asleep on the bunk. "He's been out of his head all evening. I just got him to sleep."

"Did you have a date with some one at eleven-thirty to-night?" Heenan inquired bluntly.

The astonishment in the girl's eyes was unmistakably genuine.

"Date?" she echoed. "What do you mean?"

Heenan sighed with satisfaction,

sure now of the girl's innocence. He handed her the note.

"Did you write this?"

Bessie gasped and flushed.

"Where did you get this?"

"Did you write it?" Heenan insisted.

"Yes," she admitted with a touch of defiance. "What of it? Dad forbade Curly to see me any more. He wouldn't let him come here, and there was, always some tattletale to tell if I met Curly outside anywhere. Dad told Curly I was engaged to Engel, and I wanted to see him to tell him that I wasn't. That—"

"You wrote that note to Curly?"

"Of course. Who did you think I wrote it to?"

"When?"

"Oh, a month or so ago. Dad caught me just as I was finishing it and took it away from me. Where did you get it?"

"I found it," Heenan said vaguely.

"Some one's changed it," she exclaimed. "I wrote 'your cabin' and some one has crossed out the 'your' and written 'the' over it."

Old Man Harnett stirred, sat up, and, seeing Heenan, called to him wildly.

"Did they kill him?" he asked feverishly. "Did they? He'll never get Bessie! I promised her he shouldn't. He can't have my little girl, just 'cause I'm old and broke. He cheated me, but the old man ain't all through yet. Did they kill him, Bill?"

"He's been out of his head all night," Bessie said. "I'm awfully scared."

Heenan crossed to the bunk and sat on the edge of it.

"It worked fine," he assured the old man. "They caught him."

"Did, hey?" the old man cackled. "I fixed him! He thought he'd get Bess 'cause I was an old fool, but I fixed him! If you won't squeal, Bill, I'll tell you how I—"



"I know. I got the note."

A look of cunning came into the old man's wild eyes.

"I don't know nothin' 'bout no note," he whispered. "I just stooped in front o' his door to pick up my mitten. I don't know nothin' 'bout no note."

A tremor ran through him, and he sank stiffly back on the pillow. Heenan realized that the shadow of death was on the man. Harnett seemed suddenly to realize that he was going, and temporary sanity came to him.

"Under my—pillow," he gasped. "Look, Bill."

Heenan reached under the pillow and drew forth a worn poke, fairly heavy with dust.

"You know—where I got it—Bill?" he gasped. "Don't give me away. Men I—stole it from—got plenty. I'm dying. Not her fault—I'm old—fool. Let her have it. It—keep her. Bull—cheated. I— Good enough for him. Bessie!"

The girl crossed the room and knelt by the bedside. The old man motioned weakly to the poke Heenan held.

"Gold," he whispered. "I never told you. Had some—saved out—all the time. You don't have—Engel. Old fool—saved, for—you. I'm dying. Good—"

He strained upward convulsively and collapsed. Bessie looked up at Heenan and read the truth in his eyes. Weeping bitterly, she threw herself across the form of her old father, from which the life spark had fled. Heenan laid his big hand tenderly for a moment on her golden hair and hurried out.

When Heenan entered the back room of the Palace, Curly grabbed him by the shoulders.

"Give me a chance at him, Bill?" he begged. "They said they'd leave it to you. Give me a chance at him, will you? Just give me a chance at him?"

Heenan glanced at the others, at

Bull, cowering in one corner, and back to the white-faced, fiery-eyed boy before him.

"What chance?" he asked.

"To fight him," Curly panted. "See Bessie?"

"Yes."

"What she say?"

"She didn't write Bull any note," Heenan said slowly.

Curly gave a triumphant snarl and stood erect, facing the others.

"See? I knew it was a lie! He tried to blacken my girl's name to save himself, the dirty hound! He's been tryin' all winter to force her to marry him. He cheated her father out of everythin' the old man had at poker and tried to force her to take him. She's my girl, by —! She's goin' to be my wife, and this dog's insulted her! They said they'd leave it to you, Bill. Let me at him, will you? Give me a chance!"

"Curly wants to try him out at the old Mexican gamē," Rogers explained. "Wants to be left alone here with him with the lights out and both of them stripped to their pants an' a knife."

"That's fair, Bill," Curly insisted frantically. "He's due to die for stealin', but if he can get me, let him go. That's fair. Please, Bill! I want him for what he tried to do to Bessie and for what he said about her. He belongs to me, Bill. Please! Let me have him! I'll get him, Bill! Don't be scared. If he does get away, he'll have earned the right to go, no matter what he's done. I'll make him earn it, Bill. Please! I want him! I've got a right to him! Give him to me, Bill! They said they'd leave it to you."

Bill looked searchingly at the slim, angry boy and then at Engel.

"Suit you, Bull?" he inquired.

"I been framed," Engel said desperately. "Won't you gimme a chance to—"

"You're gettin' all the odds, if Bill

leaves you fight Curly," Rogers said. "I agreed to leave it to Bill, but I hope he won't leave Curly fight yuh. We ought to draw lots an' shoot yuh sittin', you dirty, two-legged wolf!"

"I go free if I get him?" Engel asked.

"Yes," Curly shouted at him. "If you get me, you go free, but you'll never leave this room, you liar, you! Let me have him, Bill! It's my girl he lied about. It's the woman I'm goin' to marry that he's been houndin' all winter. It's my business, Bill."

Heenan looked at Engel, and across a span of twenty years came an echo: "You mind your own business." He smiled queerly and drew a long breath. His decision had been made for him by that echo in his memory.

"Take him, Curly," he said. "I hope you get him."

A gasp of astonishment came from the other men in the room. They had agreed to leave the boy's mad demand to Heenan, never doubting that he would refuse it. Curly gave a cry of savage delight and, throwing his arms about Heenan, squeezed him frantically.

"Lock that back door and strip Engel," he said briefly. "I'll get Curly ready. Come in here, kid."

Curly followed Heenan into the adjoining room, a deserted gambling booth.

"Strip to your pants, kid," Heenan ordered. "I'll tell you all I know about that Mexican game. Yes, take off your boots; yuh go at this barefoot. No chance for either one to kick. Now when I slam the door shut and leave you with him in the dark, crouch and jump to the left—"

While Heenan talked rapidly, advising him how to fight his battle, the boy stripped to his trousers, listening eagerly. When he was stripped, he emptied his pockets of their contents and sorted them over. From the mis-

cellaneous litter, he picked out a ring, a rough gold ring set with the point of a bear's tooth—a ring at the sight of which Heenan started as if he had been slapped in the face—and held it out.

"If I should get mine, Bill," he began hesitantly, "I wish you'd give this ring to— Why, what—"

"Where did you get that ring?" Heenan demanded hoarsely.

"Why, I've always had it. I—"

"Where did you get it?"

"I—don't know. I always thought maybe—it was my father's."

"Your father's?"

"I—don't know. I never knew anything about my father. I've had the ring ever since I can remember. Mother kept it for me when I was a kid, and she told me that the best man in the world gave it to me. I don't know— Maybe dad—" He hesitated, flushed with shame. "I don't know anything about my father," he confessed. "Mother never would tell me anything. I guess maybe there was something—"

"Where is your mother?"

"She's—dead."

"Where did she live?"

"St. Louis. Why? Do you know anything about— Is the ring— What is it?"

"Nothing," Heenan muttered dazedly. "Nothing, son."

He was crushed by a sense of utter helplessness. He felt himself a tiny atom on the surface of time, over which swept a succession of events, the orderly march of which he was as unable to stem as a grain of dust to turn aside a charging army. He felt a complete absence of any power of decision. He had acted his part in the different scenes of the drama which had been reaching its climax for more than twenty years, from the rainy night in Kaltishan, when he had followed a pretty face into the fog, until he had

given his decision to allow Curly to fight Engel. Had he more lines to speak, or had he made his exit? Was his part done? Was he an astounded spectator or—still one of the mummernauts? Still one of the mummernauts directed by an unheard Voice from the dim nowhere of speculative doubt or the bright somewhere of hope? In awe he listened, listened in sincere expectancy, for his cue from a Voice that he had never heard, and from far across the years came again the echo of Engel's answer to his plea for help for the woman and child who were hungry:

"Mind your own business."

"What is it?" Curly demanded fearfully. "What's the matter, Bill?"

Heenan drew a deep breath.

"Nothing," he assured the boy. "You ready?"

Curly nodded.

"Give the ring to Bessie, Bill, if I— if he should——"

Heenan interrupted him with a queer, choking laugh.

"Don't worry, boy," he said with deep conviction. "You said he was yours to get, and you spoke the truth."

"He's pretty heavy for me, but——"

"You'd get him if he was ten times your weight and had a gun in both hands and—— Come on."

They found Engel standing in a corner, stripped to the waist, barefooted, and holding a knife in his right hand.

"Stand there," Heenan instructed Curly, indicating the corner opposite where Engel stood. "I'll back out with the lamp. I'll shoot the man who moves a muscle before I close that door. When I shut the door, you'll be in darkness. Go to it. When the job's done, the one of you that's alive can knock on the door, and we'll open it."

The others filed silently from the room. Heenan backed to the door and half closed it. He stared at Bull and

laughed, a queer, shaky laugh with a note of hysteria in it.

"Good-by, Bull," he said.

"Good—good-by, Heenan," Curly faltered.

Heenan ignored him. With conviction, he said again:

"Good-by, Bull," and slammed the door.

Heenan was the only calm one of the lot when, ten minutes later, there came a knock on the door from the room of death. He was the only one not surprised when Curly staggered out. He was the only one not astonished when it was found that, save for a number of superficial flesh wounds, Curly was unharmed. He helped the panting boy wash and dress.

"Take care of that, you fellows," he said, with a jerk of his thumb toward the dark room.

"Hole in the ice is the best way. And mind, no talk. Now or ever."

The men nodded silent agreement.

"I'll take care of Curly," Heenan went on. "Remember, no talk."

He led Curly out and, with an arm about him, started for the Harnett cabin.

"Old Man Harnett's dead, Curly," he said gently. "It's you and Bessie for it now, I reckon."

"Ah, poor girl! Poor little kid!" Curly exclaimed.

"You'll look out for her?"

"You bet I will!" the boy assured him, and then, very reverently: "She—she's goin' to be my wife."

Heenan nodded.

"One promise, Curly. Never a word about to-night. Never a whisper to her, Curly, if you ever want her to be happy. Promise?"

"Yes, sir."

Heenan opened the door of the Harnett cabin and pushed Curly in ahead of him. The girl rose from beside the bunk and rushed into his arms. The boy seated himself and rocked her on

his breast like a baby. Her sobs ceased. She lay in his arms, looking up at him. Her lips were parted. In her eyes was a great, deep peace, a wonderful peace, and a reverent amazement.

"My girl!" the boy said gently. "My poor, brave little girl! My—my little—wife."

At the utterance of the magic name, the girl's eyes fluttered shut and her lips lifted to his like a flower to the first kiss of dawn.

Heenan tiptoed out and closed the door. There was a confusion of pic-

tures in his brain—a woman in Kaltishan declaring that she would rather kill her baby than have him grow to be what her "man" was; the look in the eyes of the boy when he had called the girl in his arms his wife; Engel in Kaltishan, refusing aid to his "woman," with whom he was "through;" and again Engel, flushed with anger, reiterating: "Mind your own business."

Heenan sighed as one who steps from under a load too heavy to bear.

"I did," he said whimsically, and went in search of a drink.



### AND WHO SHALL CHOOSE?

YOU come, your hand outstretched, with joyous brow;  
Aggressive, sure of your own charm, you come,  
With eyes that challenge, though your lips are dumb:  
"Lover or friend—choose now!"

How shall I choose? To love you? Shall I dare  
Choose boldly the white flame of your caress,  
Weighting delight with doubt, uneasiness,  
Or who knows what despair?

Or shall I rather choose to clasp your hand,  
Glad that you come, regretful if you go;  
Serene of heart, knowing what true friends know,  
What true friends understand?

I choose to be your friend! Surely above  
All else is such attachment, frank and free.  
I choose—and yet I have no choice! Ah, me,  
I love you, O my Love!

ETHEL D. TURNER.



## PLAYS AND PLAYERS

By

ALAN DALE

SUPPOSE that your hostess, anxious to steer away from the arbitrary conventions of dinner, decided to surprise you by starting with the coffee and working back, through sweets, roasts, entrée, and fish, to soup, ending dramatically with *hors d'œuvres*—what would be your sensations?

At first, you would probably scent some sort of joke, and would feel that it was your duty, in the interests of politeness, to seem to enjoy it. Later, perhaps, you would be quite certain that the dinner had disagreed with you. Your imagination might even soar in the direction of indigestion. Finally, at home, with all necessity for concealment at an end, you would undoubtedly experience grave resentment at the innovation, for dinner has been an established fact for so long, and a fact of such guaranteed immutability, that you would angrily accuse your hostess of dangerous gastronomic iconoclasm. During a sleepless night, the consequence of it all, you would dream of that dinner's fearful climax—caviare! Even your sense of humor, provided you own one, would be routed and completely disabled.

As it would be with such a deadeningly unchangeable affair as dinner, so it is with the almost equally unvarying thing we know as "the drama." The trials and tribulations of the profes-

sional critic are not at all imaginary. They are largely due to the monotony of his diet and to an unbudging routine far worse than that of dinner; to the fact that he has not to chronicle perpetual novelty, than which there is no more salubrious exercise, but is compelled to ring persistent changes on the same old and well-worn material.

The theatrical manager, just like your favorite cook, disapproves of all changes. Things are as they are, and because they should be! The professional critic sees on an average, each theatrical season, one hundred and fifty new productions—at least that has been the exact average for the last ten years. He is forced to write one hundred and fifty reviews of precisely the same ideas, and gradually he discovers that his sufferings are greater than he can bear. And then—and then—a sort of drooling apathy sets in, and—he is lost!

Some daring manager, precisely like the hostess I have suggested above, revolts from the established order of thing, and decides to be different. He offers theatrical entertainment that steers away from the grossly conventional. But it is too late. The critic, desiccating slowly, is appalled. He feels just as you would if you began your dinner with coffee and ended it with caviare, soup being the penultimate act. He suffers acute mental revolution, and is obliged to peepsin



himself into a semblance of comfort. The uninitiated might say: "Surely he would be delighted to get away from the usual." Not at all. Psychologically, it is quite intelligible. He has been hopelessly grooved, and he cannot budge. He is tied, as it were, hand and foot. Perhaps there was a time in his jocund young life when he gayly anticipated novelty and reveled in the opportunity that it would afford him to do it literary justice. All that has passed. He looks scornfully at anything different. He holds that the conventions of the stage are sacred—something not to be tampered with—and he is very jealous of them!

Please let me add to all this that the manager who elects to offer genuine novelty, and to smile sarcastically at convention, can never hope to succeed. The drama, like dinner, revels in its own innate monotony. You might suppose that something entirely different in the matter of playware would be tremendously attractive. That idea is pure fallacy. Sometimes a critic sick of himself—and that is a very frequent critical mood!—asserts that something is different. He is anxious to "start something." However, the public knows better. The public has heard the cry of "Wolf!" for years. The public, too, hopes for the eternally unchangeable; it has been so well drilled. When the extraordinary really happens—say once in a season—and the critic anxious to start something comes out with his announcement, there is grave dissatisfaction along Broadway.

The three undying conventions are, of course, "love" interest, the so-called happy ending—and on the stage marriage is that, even if in real life it isn't—and plenty of "evening dress." I may add that, even if it were possible to do away with the "love" interest, and even if the happy ending could be relegated to the interrogation mark, the fetish of "evening dress" would still re-

main. For that we positively growl, as a dog growls for its bone.

There is one manager in our trameled city who is rather inclined to do the extraordinary thing, or the eccentric thing, and to be original. Of course, he is a very rich man, but he has the right to do as he chooses with his own money. Instead of collecting rare prints or blue china, he is at liberty to do odd things at his theater. It is expensive, but pardonable. Wiseacres smile at his foibles, and point to the crowds assembled at the box offices where plays move along on schedule time, where the ruined lady is righted in the last act, the villain foiled as villains always are, the comedy couple united in holy matrimony, and the disabled Wall Street man reinstated appropriately. Mr. Winthrop Ames is not, in the least affected by this behavior on the part of the public.

If I were a juvenile person, just beginning to write about matters undramatic—I mean dramatic—I should say enthusiastically of Mr. Winthrop Ames that he is "the hope of the drama." Oh, I should! I am quite sure that I should.

That is exactly what I used to say of iconoclasts when I was a laughing lad. The phrase had such a merry sound. And it read so well. Not to-day would I make so ludicrous a remark, with my sense of humor! The "hope of the drama" is the manager who treats it as it has always been treated, who gives it soup to begin with and coffee to end with, and does not reason why.

Mr. Ames' offering to the present season has been, in addition to "Pierrot the Prodigal," which was really quite old and unventuresome, a comedy by a comparatively unknown playwright called Violet Pearn. This was entitled "Hush!"—an extremely apt title. The play proved to be English, and had been seen abroad in such

artistic centers as Liverpool and Manchester—not London.

Ponder upon that! The usual American manager banks upon London, with a wild and exuberant bank. Stage convention prompts that course. We have seen play after play, heralded as eminently successful in London, promptly fail in this city. That makes no difference in the judgment of the theatrical manager. Nothing but the current war has interfered with his London researches. The London play to-day is merely impossible, because it doesn't exist. Yet, in spite of this, Mr. Ames produced "Hush!" after Manchester and Liverpool had seen it. Infamous!

It turned out to be what is called "a play within a play." That is to say, the characters to which we were introduced in the first act were supposed to view those we saw in the next act, at the theater. Act I. was labeled, "Before the Play;" Act II., "The Play;" and Act III., "After the Play."

Professional critics, in despair at this, which *seemed* novel, hunted around for precedents. It was a fearful dilemma. Suppose—I say suppose—they had discovered no precedents. What would have happened? Fortunately there is generally a precedent for everything, even for novelty, and the researches of the critics were quite successful. They unearthed the fact that "Hush!" was "another use of the pattern which 'Fanny's First Play' familiarized to this generation."

Oh, the joy of that! There *was* a pattern, thank goodness! There *was* a precedent! So "Hush!" was spared absolute annihilation. I often wonder why there isn't a "paper" pattern for plays, as there is for gowns and mantles.

Having settled that point, the rest mattered little. The pattern, however, having been set by Bernard Shaw, of whom professional criticism speaks in

bated breath—though Shaw had to fight hard for his claim to originality, and is still fighting all the time for it—"Hush!" came in for a share of comment. It was not in the least enthusiastic comment, the sort that makes for "success," for professional criticism merely pretends to adore the novelty that it despises, but it *was* comment.

The little play was delightfully breezy and clever—just the sort of thing that *should* have been written by Shaw, but wasn't. Perhaps it will be later; one never knows.

The heroine of the "play within the play"—viewed by the characters in the first part—is a young girl who has been reared in one of the Channel Islands, and brought up to believe that maternity is something to be rather proud of. She appears, after her marriage, at a strait-laced and conventional English rectory, and does not hesitate to discuss her prospective maternity. They are absolutely shocked at her frankness, which is unintelligible to them. Such things are usually discussed in whispers. The young woman who wishes to ventilate her opinions must select a moment when there are no men around. This *Lucilla* cannot understand. Why hesitate about mentioning a child before it is born, when it is so widely talked about afterward?

Miss Pearn rings the changes upon this idea deliciously. It is all very witty and most amusing—really an excellent idea for Shaw. When Shaw *does* use it, it will be acclaimed as most satirical. Shaw is the only writer unchallenged by professional criticism, perhaps because he can "get back" so gorgeously and is permitted to do it. No wonder that everybody is afraid of caviling at Shaw.

"Hush!" does not continue persistently along its lines of logical amusement. Miss Pearn's conclusion is weak, for she makes her heroine succumb to the ideas that she inhales at the rectory

to such an extent that, after baby's birth, she is ashamed of maternity, and hides her offspring each time that a man appears. Of course, that is funny, but too irrational to stand the wear and tear of hearty laughter. The girl alludes to her child as "the event," "the link," and "a certain subject." When the father of the child comes home after a long absence, he finds his bride strangely oppressed by the circumstance that she is a mother, and quite abashed at the idea. Still, it is good and original—too much so to be popular and to enjoy "a run." Its mission to get as far away from the conventional as possible is fulfilled extremely well, and if the characters "Before the Play" enjoyed themselves as much as I did, they were exceedingly fortunate.

The other part of the play—the "play without," so to speak—deals with a young woman who has joined the Daughters of Revealment, pledged to do or say something shocking every day. She is the natural result of centuries of feminine oppression. She writes the play that is intended to affront the sensibilities of everybody. A white-haired dowager is introduced to announce that she is never shocked, but only bored, at sex discussions, and the character is admirably drawn.

Not satisfied with producing this play by an unknown playwright, Mr. Ames did another risky thing. He filled his cast with nearly unknown people, and utterly eliminated the "metropolitan favorite." The popular manager of today, when he has a new play, looks around for some name. He must have a name. If the prevailing rôle is that of an ingénue, he clamors for the most expensive; or if the interest centers around some "dashing" young man, he knows his type, and if he cannot other-

wise secure him, he borrows him. The actor appears "by the courtesy of Manager So-and-So." He takes no chances. Mr. Winthrop took every chance, and his cast was as nearly perfect as a cast can be. This was particularly true of the charming young woman who played *Lucilla*, Miss Estelle Winwood. Mr. Ames might have borrowed some pretty girl of the Billie Burke or the Ann Murdock type. Eccentric person! He did nothing of the kind. He introduced us to Miss Winwood, who was lovely. When professional criticism grows accustomed to somebody it doesn't know, it will duly appreciate the youth, the vivacity, and the charm, of this most agreeable actress. Of course that will be for the future. Miss Winwood may be an antique by that time. Cecil Yapp, Augusta Haviland, Cecil Fletcher, Louie Emery, Winifred Fraser, Eric Blind, and several others, gave exquisite flavor to the dramatic personæ.

"Hush!" was just the play to be—hushed!

What else have I seen since you last heard from me? Oh, plenty. Let me mention "Arms and the Girl," a pleasant little war play full of love; "His Majesty Bunker Bean," a pleasant little farce, full of farce; "Betty," a very pleasant musical show, full of girls; "Fixing Sister," a pleasant comedy full of William Hodge; "Le Poilu," a pleasant French affair, full of—French; "The Music Master," the eternally pleasant Warfield feature, full of pathos; "So Long Letty," a pleasant play with music, full of Chicago; "Go To It," "Object Matrimony"—oh, and lots of other things.

This, however, being for the unusual, may I cease? Perhaps it *would* be advisable. On second thoughts—yes.

# Ainslee's Open Door

## Our Heritage of Christmas Cheer

**W**HETHER Christ was born on the 25th of December, the 6th of January, or on a day in April, May, or October, as various learned commentators contend, matters nothing, for the chief fact remains that His heart and mind have made the world a dwelling place of greater love and beauty and worth than otherwise would have been. And it is in our Christmas customs and festivities that we celebrate the democracy, tolerance, and pervasive power of the Nazarene, Who embraced all mankind in His teaching and made the very seasons His own. The spirit of Christmas unites us with past, present, and future humanity.

At this time of year we are one with the Greeks and Romans when we twine the evergreen and wreath the holly and make gifts, for such was the custom of these ancient peoples upon a day of extraordinary rejoicing like that of their Saturnalia. We are one with the persecuted Christians of the Catacombs when we sing our carols, for these early believers left archaeological evidence of their "Allelulias" with which they hailed the Nativity. We are one with the Goths and Vandals when we put up our Christmas tree and deck it with gifts and glittering baubles, for these fierce barbarians of the northern forests used the fir tree, on the feast day of the sun, and in honor of Thor and Odin, ornamented it with symbols of Light and Nature, the tree representing the universe, its trophies the sun, moon, stars, and the fruits and animals of the earth. We are one with the Druids when we hang the mistletoe, for these priests of Albion cut the plant at this season according to mystic rite and omen. We are one with the Anglo-Saxons when we build a roaring fire and eat our roast pig or turkey and drink our punch, for those hardy and uncouth sons of old Britain made it a sacred ceremony to set the Yule log ablaze, and then stuff themselves with boar and peacock and wassail. We are one with the Normans when we sing our glees, tell our jokes, perform our sleight-of-hand tricks, and dance, for at many a Christmastide did William the Conqueror and his court indulge in like revelries with their jugglers, minstrels, and jesters. We are one with the Elizabethans when we have our charades, masques, and plays, for in those "spacious times" dramatic entertainments and mummery were the characteristic celebration of the Yule days. We are one with the New Amsterdam Dutch when we use our stockings as invitation to St. Nick, for they used their shoes in similar fashion, putting them about the fireplace as receptacles for gift and goodie.

From the foregoing glimpse of Christmas custom it will be seen that "Merrie" England came by her title honestly. Even the Puritan period of rigid rule against all such "pagan practices" merely smothered temporarily the fires of joy and laughter—fires that were to burn all too bright and hot with the Restoration. In our own history of Christmas, we began soberly enough with the *Mayflower* wayfarers, but as we attained prosperity and ease and broader outlook, we grew more gracious and vivacious. The New Amsterdam burghers,

however, were always ready for festivities; as were the gay colonial settlers of the South.

To-day, our Yule log may be one of asbestos and gas, our Christmas tree may be a papier-mâché dwarf for the table, our turkey may be a vegetable compound, our holly may be artificial and our evergreens straw, our wassail may be cider or grape juice, but so long as our spirit remains as of yore, glad and loving, generous and free, we need not deprecate these sorrier emblems of our rejoicing, though we may regret their diminished glory and transformation.

D. E. W.

### Those Mysterious Cats

**W**HEN the dog, last night, entered into verbal communication with the moon, you yelled, "Shut up, there!" and straightway he obeyed. When the cat, an hour later, accompanied her back-fence stroll with horrible music, you howled, "Scat!" Did she scat? She did not. She scattent at all; unless the missile you threw chanced to fall undesirably near her. In that event—and did you ever hear of any one's hitting a cat he threw at?—she merely shifted out of range and sang on, unruffled. Why? Why does Towser obey and why doesn't Tabby? For the very simplest reason: Towser has to; Tabby doesn't. No, Tabby doesn't have to mind. Tabby never has had to mind. Tabby never will have to mind. Tabby is the one absolutely free and fearless and workless creature on the earth's face. Tabby, also, is the eternal mystery. Compared to her, the Sphinx is a self-explanatory babbler.

It began ever so long ago, when the pyramids were not, when the planet was porous. Man appeared and declared himself master of the world, calling on all other created things to be his slaves or to get off the earth. The animals responded, each after his kind. The dog, the horse, the flocks, the herds, all came into camp. From that day, they have served man, and in return have been fed by him. The lion, the tiger, the bear, the puma, the leopard, the rhino, and so forth, refused. And man has driven them to the uttermost recesses of the jungle, where, steadily, he is exterminating them.

But the cat? The cat not only rejected man's terms, but made terms of her own—terms that man has meekly kept, although he had no share in their making. The cat, point-blank, refused to do a single service for mankind—except to catch mice, now and then—and that she does solely for her own amusement and never to order—and at the same time refused to be driven from the earth along with the other rebel beasts.

She shares the warmest place in the sun or on the fireside rug. She eats of the best. She obeys no orders, except when it so pleases her. She refuses to exert herself, and you cannot beat her into such exertion. She takes man's best, and she won't do a lick of work in exchange. How does she get away with it? That is the mystery. A dog that won't mind, a horse that won't toil, a hen that won't lay, a cow that won't give milk—well, you know well enough what happens to them. But the cat!

Nor does she win her place by loyalty or by the appeal of the timid. Loyalty? When you are turned out of doors, your poor fool of a dog will follow you out into the traditional snow. Your wise cat will stalk daintily to the nearest house where milk and warmth abound. Fear? Let a common peil menace a puppy, a baby, and a kitten. The baby howls for mamma. The puppy rolls over and waves imploring forepaws in the air. The kitten arches her back and



delivers a telling scratch where it will look worst. From babyhood, the cat knows no cowardice. She is the only creature that does not. And she is a lone hunter. You hear of packs of wild dogs, horses, and so forth. Did you ever hear of a pack of wild cats? Never. Tabby is too wise to herd with her kind.

And, in passing, why is a dog always "he" and a cat always "she?"

By kindness and unwearying patience, you may teach Towser a lot of clever tricks. By whanging his ribs to a jelly, the animal-act men make him perform wonders. (Oh, the horrible tortures to a helpless puppy that every trained-dog stunt entails!) But do you see cats do the same clever feats? You do not. It isn't that Tabby has not sense enough to learn them, but that she has far too much sense. She will do nothing through fear. She will do nothing except through hunger, and very little for that. So the trainers starve her into learning. It is said that every trained cat represents at least twenty-seven kittens starved to death. The other twenty-six ran true to feline form. And the twenty-seventh will learn only the very easiest line of tricks. Whip her, and she goes on strike forevermore.

From the earliest ages, Tabby has ruled man. For example, the ancient Egyptians looked on dogs as untouchably unclean. But the cat calmly made herself at home in Egypt, and then proceeded to become sacred there. Here is the story of how she became St. Tabby of the Nile:

Egypt was swept by the bubonic plague. The plague—though people did not know it—was spread by rats. It was noticed, after a while, that the houses where cats were kept were free from the plague. Instead of realizing that rats and cats do not get along fraternally together, the Egyptians promptly declared that the plague devil was afraid of cats, and that cats were therefore sacred to the gods. They even set up a cat god, Bubastes by name. Tabby had made herself immune from ill, in a land that abused other animals and in an age when cat meat might otherwise have been deemed a rare delicacy. And why don't we eat cats? Tabby alone knows.

Benjamin Franklin worked out a theory to prove that the hay crops were richest in neighborhoods most infested by old maids. He argued that all old maids keep cats; that cats live largely on field mice and on other vermin that attack the grass roots; ergo, that the more old maids, the better hay.

Which brings us to the problem: Why is a cat? and to as much of its solution as any one can puzzle out—except Tabby.

L. A. D.



## Talks With Ainslee's Readers

MAY EDGINTON, in "The Woman Who Broke the Rule," presented a strong picture of the inevitable consequences to the girl who, even through accident of circumstances, rather than intent, violates our double-standard code of morality. After reading it, one was bound to feel that woman has all the worst of it in life; that what is sauce for the gander is poison for the goose. Let her slip ever so slightly and she is damned, while man, sinning willfully and repeatedly, may still move about among his fellows socially unscathed.

Is there no violation of the moral code for which a man must equally suffer? A violation that will bring upon him the scorn of men and women, complete ostracism wherever he goes, while the woman involved meets only with pity, or, at the worst, mild ridicule? There is a law in man's code with just such a penalty for its violation. It is such a vague, indefinite law that it is sometimes difficult to know in exactly which cases it applies; but when the world has found the transgressor guilty, the punishment is swift and inevitable.

It is this theme that May Edginton has taken for her latest and, we believe, her most absorbing novel—"The Man Who Broke the Rule."

Lance Harrison, the central figure of the story, is a young man of good looks and great personal charm and a knack of living up to his clothes, but beyond his income. We first meet him in the luxurious rooms he has been occupying in a fashionable London hotel. He rings for a box of his favorite cigars, lights one, and proceeds to count the

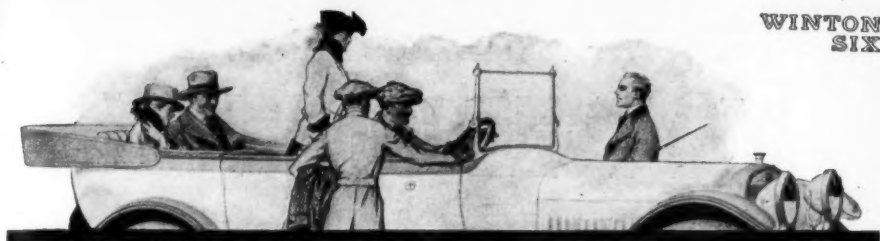
few coins in his pockets again. It is as bad as he feared. He calmly summons the manager and explains that he does not expect to pay the large account he has been running up, for the very good reason that he has no money. After the first outburst from the manager has subsided, Harrison suggests that he might pay off his indebtedness by playing the violin among the tables at dinner. To prove his skill, he plays a few bars for the manager, who, though no judge of music, is shrewd enough to see the business possibilities in this young man, who has already attracted the attention of the women patrons with his magnetism and "manner." They agree upon terms. He is an immediate success when he strolls among the tables playing languorous music. The place becomes the vogue with romantic women. One in particular, the widow of old Iron, the millionaire, succumbs to his fascination and fiddling. They meet, become acquainted, and then—he breaks the rule.

The first large installment of "The Man Who Broke the Rule" will be printed in the next issue of AINSLEE'S.

THE complete novelette for February will be "The Dark Wood Nymph," a charming romance by Elmer Brown Mason, author of "Gloves, Love, and Monte Carlo."

The next of Albert Payson Terhune's sparkling "Stories of the Superwomen" deals with Fanny Elssler, the beautiful Austrian dancer who ensnared "L'Aiglon," the only son of Napoleon Bonaparte.

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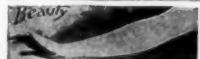
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The National Credit Jewelers  
Dept. H843, 100 N. Dear St.,  
Chicago, Ill.  
Stores in Pittsburgh  
St. Louis, Omaha

## Don't Wear a Truss



**C.E. BROOKS, 212 State Street, Marshall, Mich.**

**BROOKS' APPLIANCE**, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that relieves rupture will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads. Has automatic Air Cushions. Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb. No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Protected by U. S. patents. Catalogue and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today.



"Can take a pound a day off a patient, or put it on. Other systems may temporarily alleviate, but this is sure and permanent."—N. Y. San, Aug., 1891. Send for lecture: "Great Subject of Fat."

No Dieting.

No Hard Work.

**DR. JOHN WILSON GIBBS' TREATMENT FOR THE PERMANENT REDUCTION OF OBESITY**

Harmless and Positive. No Failure. Your reduction is assured—reduce to stay. One month's treatment **\$6.00**. Mail or office, **1370 Broadway, New York**. A **PERMANENT REDUCTION GUARANTEED**.

"Is positive and permanent."—N. Y. Herald, July 8, 1888.

"On Obesity, Dr. Gibbs is the recognized authority."—N. Y. World, July 7, 1899



**PARKER'S HAIR BALSAM**  
A toilet preparation of merit. Helps to eradicate dandruff. For Restoring Color and Beauty to Gray or Faded Hair. 50c. and \$1.00 at Druggists.

**HINDERCORNS** Removes Corns, Callouses, etc., stops all pain, ensures comfort to the feet, makes walking easy. 10c. by mail or at Druggists. Hixson Chemical Works, Patchogue, N. Y.



**Beautifully Curly, Wavy Hair Like "Nature's Own"**

In three hours you can have just the prettiest curls and waves! And they remain a long time, when Liquid Silmerine is used before rolling the hair in curlers.

**Liquid Silmerine**

Is perfectly harmless. Easily applied with brush. Hair is nice and fluffy when combed out. Silmerine is also a splendid dressing. Keeps hair fine and glossy. Directions with bottle. At your druggist's.

## Vapo Cresolene

ESTABLISHED 1879

**for Whooping Cough, Spasmodic Croup, Asthma, Sore Throat, Coughs, Bronchitis, Colds, Catarrh.**

"Used while you sleep."

Don't fail to use Cresolene for the distressing, and often fatal, affections for which it is recommended. It is a simple, safe, effective and drugless treatment.

Vaporized Cresolene stops the paroxysms of Whooping Cough and relieves Spasmodic Croup at once.

In Asthma it shortens the attack and ensures comfortable repose.

The air carrying the antiseptic vapor, inspired with every breath, makes breathing easy, soothes the sore throat, and stops the cough, assuring restful nights.

Cresolene relieves the bronchial complications of Scarlet Fever and Measles and is a valuable aid in the treatment of Diphtheria.

Cresolene's best recommendation is its 37 years of successful use. Send us postal for Descriptive Booklet.

**For Sale by Druggists**

Try Cresolene Antiseptic Throat Tablets for the irritated throat, composed of slippery elm bark, licorice, sugar and Cresolene. They can't harm you. Of your druggist or from us, 10c. in stamps.

**THE VAPO-CRESOLENE CO., 62 Cortlandt St., N. Y.**  
or Leeming-Miles Building, Montreal, Canada

## Try These for Your VOICE

—and get rid of the hoarseness, allay the irritation, soothe the "scrapy" feeling and strengthen the vocal chords.

**BROWN'S BRONCHIAL TROCHES**

help the voices of singers and speakers, relieve coughs and bronchial affections. A cough remedy—not a candy. Effective and convenient. 25c, 50c, and \$1. a box.

**New 10c Trial Size Box at your Druggist**  
If your dealer cannot supply you, see John I. Brown & Son, Boston, Mass.



Selected Pure Turkish Tobacco with a distinctive individual blend which is appreciated by smokers of discrimination and taste.

■ SEND US \$2.00 FOR ■  
100 BUD CIGARETTES  
PACKED IN A CEDAR BOX OR  
\$1.00 FOR A BOX OF 50  
■ POSTPAID TO ANY ADDRESS ■



# An Entirely New Type of Humorous Weekly Has Made Its Appearance Amid a Storm of Hearty Laughter

**N**EWSPAPERMEN are the best judges of humor living. They all vote "The Freedom of the Press" in PUCK, the funniest department ever printed. Every one of these gems is an authentic clipping from the rural press:

***It Does Not Pay to Be a Charmer***

He was gored by an infatuated bull.

***It May Be All Right***

Josh Stitzenhazer and Helen Blazes were locked in the blessed embrace of love at the home of Si Abner

***Convivial and Convenient***

WANTED—10-acre farm on paved road. Must be within two miles of a saloon.

***Trusting***

The violin was made in 1626 by Fecit Anno Domini. Proof of the date is to be seen on an age-worn paper inside of the case.

***A Good Provider***

FOR SALE—A good hen now laying eggs, also new potatoes, fence posts and russet apples.

***There Are Not Many Like Him***

Uncle Josh wore the seat out of those fine pants reading the Bible.

***Some Preacher***

The vespers will be celebrated here Saturday night. Father Gerey will arrive on Saturday, accompanied by three of the chorus girls.

***Getting More than You Expect***

For Sale—A Guernsey cow, gives a good quality of milk, also hay, rope, pulleys and small refrigerator.

***Did She Marry Him?***

Walter Davison, the doggonedest fool in the county, got stung Sunday night by a small girl.

***How About Ensilage?***

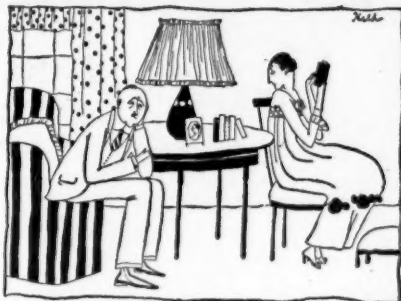
After the cards, Mrs. Taylor delighted the guests with three silos.

***An Old One***

Mr. Sykes has been married fifty years and his war stories are well worth listening to.

***The Business of Landing Him***

When you see two white shoes drying on a window sill in this town and a girl hanging out of the same window to dry her hair, you can bet she isn't going to eat raw onions for supper.



We hate to print this doleful picture of domestic gloom, but truth compels us to expose a home that has not yet known the solid, rib-tickling fun making of

# PUCK

"America's Cleverest Weekly"

Unlike the old-fashioned type of humorous paper, PUCK tries to be downright funny. It lays back its head and roars at the foibles, fakes and fallacies of the day. Nearly every good story you hear nowadays has its start in the pages of PUCK. If your newsdealer hasn't a copy of the new PUCK, pin a dollar bill to this coupon, write your name and address plainly, and prepare to spend the happiest three months of your life.



PUCK

210 Fifth Avenue, New York  
For the enclosed \$1.00, kindly enter my name for  
a Three Months' Trial Subscription.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY AND STATE

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements.

EVERY WOMAN NEEDS

# The Complete Cook Book

By JENNIE DAY REES

**N**O matter how well a woman can cook, there are times when doubt as to the ingredients of a certain bit of cookery arises in her mind. Then, if she has a good cook book handy she does not have to guess.

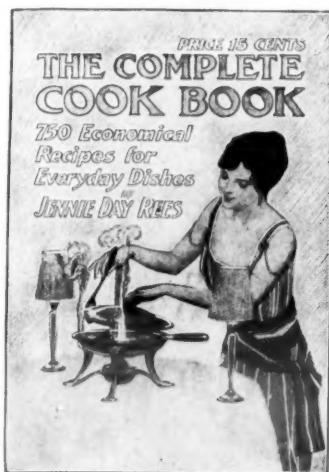
"The Complete Cook Book" is what its name signifies. It contains seven hundred and fifty splendidly arranged, economical recipes which are so worded that the housewife

simply takes ingredient after ingredient and adds them to each other in regular order. When she

is through taking cans and boxes from her closet, the product is ready for the oven.

The price—Fifteen Cents—places it within the reach of everybody.

For sale by all news dealers; or, if your dealer cannot supply you, add four cents to the above price and order direct from the publishers.



**STREET & SMITH, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK**

# WANT TO GROW HAIR?

If you desire to grow hair on that bald spot, or to stop falling hair, or completely banish dandruff, you should test the true value of Koskott. We offer

## \$500. Cash Guarantee

that we can produce over 1000 genuine voluntary testimonials



W. H. COPELAND (photo above) reports: "My hair is improving right along, the bald spot looks darker; I am thankful I heard of Koskott."

### READ THESE EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS; WE HAVE LEGIONS MORE.

"For eight or nine years I have been a bald-headed man; the top of my head was as bare as my hand. Now hair is growing again. It is the most wonderful thing I ever saw."—**Lee Fish**, Clayton Co., Iowa.

"I can no longer find the place where the bald spot was; the hair is as long there as on any other place of the head."—**Matt Bagley**, Itasca Co., Minn.

"My hair has quit falling out, my scalp itches no more and new hair is growing thickly."—**Mrs. J. Lundeen**, Multnomah Co., Oregon.

"After being bald 20 years, my head is mostly covered with new hair; am well pleased."—**Geo. Van Wyck**, Union Co., N. J.

"The baldness on my head has entirely disappeared, being covered with hair, by use of Koskott Hair Grower."—**Prof. C. E. Bowman**, Maryland.

"For growing hair and making it beautiful there is nothing like Koskott, for my hair is now a surprise to all my friends. I am telling everybody of your wonderful hair grower."—**Mrs. W. Rabiger**, Alleghany Co., Pa.

"Koskott has started a new growth of hair on my head."—**R. C. Cunningham**, Abbeville Co., S. C.

"The hair is now about an inch long on my head where there was not a hair in 30 years; Koskott did it."—**J. J. Ellis**, Minnesota.

"Four months ago my scalp was bare; now it is covered with a nice growth of hair and it is growing nicely."—**W. C. Colman**, Red River Co., La.

"One sample box and one full box of Koskott have grown hair on my head where I was perfectly bald."—**A. W. Bowser**, Butler Co., Pa.

"I was bald and never could find anything to bring the hair back until I used Koskott."—**Esther Arnett**, Wallace Co., Ky.



MRS. JENNIE DAVIS, who reports full growth over completely bald head in a few weeks. She used Koskott exclusively.

## BOX FREE TO YOU

We offer to send you a testing box of Koskott FREE, postpaid. It is probably different from anything you ever used on your scalp before. It is inexpensive because concentrated. We know that Koskott has surprised and delighted many who were losing or had lost their hair and feared they must remain bald throughout life.

What Koskott has done for others' hair, why not for yours?

If you have entire or partial baldness alopecia areata (bald spots), barbers' itch, dandruff, dry scalp, brittle hair, falling hair, if you get a lot of hair on your comb whenever you use it, itching scalp, or other hair or scalp trouble, try Koskott.

## GROW HAIR!

You need only ask for a free box of Koskott—a postcard will do. It will come to you promptly, with full directions, and you can soon decide what it will do for you.

**Koskott Laboratory, 1269 Broadway, 848 C, New York City**

# Special Introductory Offer!—



The new Burlington—just out—distributed now for the first time—and on an astounding offer. The superb new model far surpassing everything of the past. 21 jewels, adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism. New thin design—and all the newest ideas in gold strata cases to choose from. Send coupon today for full particulars.

*And*—we will send you this master watch without a cent down. If you decide to buy it—you pay *only* the rock-bottom price—the same price that even wholesale jeweler must pay.

**\$250 a Month!**  
Just think of it!  
\$2.50 a month—less than ten cents a day

will pay, at the rock-bottom price, for the New 21-Jewel Burlington—the master watch. This perfect time-piece will be sent to you, prepaid, without a cent deposit so that you can see and examine it for yourself. When you hold it in your hand you will realize what a gigantic value it is—and you will know how the Burlington brought the highest watch value within the reach of all.

## 21 Jewels

- adjusted to positions
- adjusted to temperature
- adjusted to isochronism
- adjusted to the second.

Runs almost 2 days in one winding.

On an Iron-clad guarantee.

## Newest

up-to-date ideas in gold strata cases—the master products of the goldsmith's art are illustrated in colors in our new Watch Book. All yours to choose from. Write for the new watch book now.

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Please send me, without obligation (and prepaid), your free book on watches, with full explanation of your cash or \$2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

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Write today for our new catalog. Read about this gigantic watch value. Learn about watch movements and why 21 jewels are the number prescribed by watch experts. Read what makes a watch movement perfect—and how the Burlington is adjusted to the second. The watch book is free. Write for it today and get posted on watches and watch values. Send the coupon.

**Burlington Watch Co.** Dept. 1131, 19th St. & California Av., Chicago



# Tobacco Habit **BANISHED**

## in 48 to 72 Hours



### Immediate Results

Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will. Just take Tobacco Redeemer according to directions.

It doesn't make a particle of difference whether you've been a user of tobacco for a single month or for 50 years, or how much you use, or in what form you use it. Whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff Tobacco Redeemer will positively remove all craving for tobacco in any form in from 48 to 72 hours. Your tobacco craving will begin to decrease after the very first dose—there's no long waiting for results.

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

### Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It quiets the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of Tobacco Redeemer treatment for the habit.

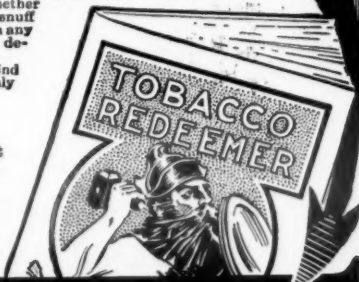
### Results Absolutely Guaranteed

A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If Tobacco Redeemer fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

### Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our free booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system, and positive proof that Tobacco Redeemer will quickly free you from the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company  
Dept. 570, St. Louis, Mo.



## Mail Coupon NOW for FREE Booklet

NEWELL PHARMACAL CO.,  
Dept. 570, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send, without obligating me in any way, your free booklet regarding the tobacco habit and proof that Tobacco Redeemer will positively free me from the tobacco habit.

Name .....

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Town ..... State .....





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